

ADDRESSING THE SPIRITUAL FORMATION NEEDS OF A NEW CHURCH:
CURRENT REALTIES, FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES AND
FORMATIVE CURRICULUM

A THESIS

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ADAM LEE FELDMAN

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To Kimberly, my wife, best friend and journey mate;
To Abigail, my daughter of delight; to Joshua, my son of Levi.

Thus says the LORD:

Stand by the roads, and look,
and ask for the ancient paths,
where the good way is; and walk in it,
and find rest for your souls...

— *Jeremiah 6:16a-b*

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ABBREVIATIONS

BCMD	Baptist Convention of Maryland/Delaware
CG	Community Group
CNC	Carson-Newman College
D.Min.	Doctor of Ministry
FG	Focus Group
GCTS	Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary
IRB	Institutional Review Board
LTG	Life Transformation Group
M.Div.	Master of Divinity
RCRC	Roger Carter Recreation Center
RQ	Research Question
WG	Worship Gathering

ABSTRACT

This Doctor of Ministry thesis-project demonstrates that a contextualized spiritual formation curriculum can be designed for new and missional Christian churches through theological reflection and congregational assessment. There were two methods of research employed. First, theological reflection was utilized to develop of a spiritual theology based upon an interpretation of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7) through a theological framework of Christian spiritual formation. Further, a literature review demonstrates the uniqueness of Christian spirituality in contemporary western culture and emphasizes how this is reflected in prayer. Second, survey research—through a spiritual formation questionnaire and focus group interviews—was conducted to determine the current formation realities for Metanoia Church, a church plant in Ellicott City, Maryland. The theological reflection and survey data were synthesized to design a contextualized pathway for congregational spiritual formation that is comprehensive and philosophically missional. Summary comments are given on the role of spiritual formation in church planting.

CHAPTER 1

THE CONTEXT AND THE PROBLEM ADDRESSED

Metanoia Church is a spiritual community moving toward Jesus Christ.

— Purpose Statement

Don't look for shortcuts to God. The market is flooded with surefire, easygoing formulas for a successful life that can be practiced in your spare time. Don't fall for that stuff, even though crowds of people do. The way to life—to God!—is vigorous and requires total attention.

— Jesus Christ, Matthew 7:13-14 (The Message)

Introduction

Metanoia Church was birthed in the fall of 2005 in the historic district of Ellicott City, a suburb in the Baltimore metro area. At the time of writing, the church community is made up of a diversity of cultures, races and ethnicities—with persons of European, Chinese, Taiwanese, Thai, Korean, Trinidadian, African and Hispanic descent. People who have come to a saving knowledge and personal faith in Jesus Christ within the Metanoia Church community come from such backgrounds as Buddhism, the occult, atheism, Jehovah Witness and new age spiritualities. Metanoia is denominationally aligned with the Southern Baptist Convention, but persons of Catholic, Lutheran, Methodist, Church of Christ, Assembly of God, Anglican, Presbyterian and non-denominational backgrounds have found a spiritual home in the church. How is Christian

spiritual formation facilitated among new believers and veteran saints of such diverse ethnic, spiritual and theological backgrounds?

This Doctor of Ministry thesis-project answers this question by discovering current spiritual formation realities, determining future opportunities and designing a formative curriculum for Metanoia. The goal is to facilitate the spiritual growth of new believers and veteran saints alike so that the Apostle Paul's prayer for the Ephesians is realized in Metanoia:

...that according to the riches of his glory [God] may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God (Eph 3:16-19 English Standard Version).

Chapter 1 of this thesis-project establishes the problem to be addressed and the context in which it will be addressed. Chapter 2 introduces the author's theological framework of spiritual formation and applies it for a formative interpretation of the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5-7). Chapter 3 is a literature dialogue engaging other authors with the spiritual theology framework presented in Chapter 2. Chapter 4 details the research methodology utilized to determine present realities and future opportunities for spiritual formation at Metanoia, as well as the results of the research. Chapter 5 concludes with a spiritual formation curriculum contextualized to the ministry context of this chapter and melded with the theology presented in Chapters 2 and 3 that addresses the identified realities determined in Chapter 4. Summary observations on the value of assessing spiritual formation in new churches are made at the conclusion of Chapter 5.

Context: Metanoia Church, Ellicott City, Maryland

In the summer of 2005, Adam and Kimberly Feldman were commissioned by Crosspointe Community Church in Roswell, Georgia to start a new church in the historic district of Ellicott City, Maryland. Financial partnerships were formed with the Mid-Maryland Baptist Association and the Baptist Convention of Maryland and Delaware as well as three local churches. In September 2005, work on the new church plant began with the formation of a five-person church planting team.¹

At the time of writing, Metanoia is a church of roughly sixty-five persons—forty of which are covenant Partners (i.e. “church members”). Another sixteen are children ages five and under. The most visible expression of the Metanoia community is the Worship Gathering, and as demonstrated below, it is also a simple way to track Metanoia’s history.

The planting team began holding a Bible study in the home of a non-believing participant in January 2006. When the group outgrew the living room Bible study, a suitable location was found to hold a bi-monthly Worship Gathering at the Roger Carter Recreation Center (RCRC) in Ellicott City. Later that year, the Gathering grew large enough to gather weekly. Due to renovations at the RCRC, the Gathering was temporarily relocated to Benjamin Banneker State Park in August 2009. In September 2009, the Gathering relocated once again to a cocktail lounge on Main Street in Historic Ellicott City called Upstairs at Sharkey’s. In the spring of 2011, Sharkey’s went out of business and Metanoia took over the lease of the bar, knocked down walls and converted it into a place to gather for worship and to host community events. Since the gathering

¹ For historical reference, the five-person planting team consisted of Adam and Kimberly Feldman, Matthew and Jennifer Otto and Scott Feldman, the author’s brother.

space is not conducive for immersion, Metanoia conducts baptisms in swimming pools, at partner churches and in the Patapsco River, which literally runs through Ellicott City.

Metanoia's Missional Philosophy: Gathered for Adoration, Scattered for Action

As a new church, Metanoia adopted a philosophy of ministry described as “missional” in contemporary literature. This philosophy has guided Metanoia in developing ministry structure and carrying out the mission of the church. Metanoia's missional philosophy, structure and context are detailed below. “Missional” describes the philosophy and ministry context within which a curriculum for spiritual formation for Metanoia must take place.

In *Shaped By God's Heart*, Milfred Minatrea describes a missional church as “a reproducing community of authentic disciples, being equipped as missionaries sent by God, to live and proclaim His Kingdom in their world.” What makes a church community missional is that they “exist as the presence of Christ, those who know Him and make Him known to others,” within a specific context.²

Metanoia's purpose statement reflects this idea of a missional community sent to advance Jesus' agenda: “Metanoia Church is a spiritual community moving toward Jesus Christ.”³ This statement defines Metanoia as a community both experientially knowledgeable of the Person of Jesus Christ and desiring to help others move toward him. “Repent,” as the word “metanoia” means in Greek, is a personal and communal

² Milfred Minatrea, *Shaped By God's Heart: The Passion and Practices of Missional Churches*, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004), xvi, 10.

³ Metanoia Church, “Our Beliefs,” Metanoia Church, http://metanoiachurch.org/?page_id=18 (accessed June 10, 2010).

movement away from sin, Satan and the world and toward Jesus Christ in belief and deed. Thus, the emphasis on movement in Metanoia's purpose statement is "missional."

Part of helping people *metanoia* involves the intentional act of sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ in word and deed, or "evangelism." In *Breaking the Missional Code*, Ed Stetzer and David Putman describe missional churches as placing an emphasis on relationships as the primary avenue of evangelism. Stetzer and Putman explain:

The gospel has and always will continue to travel best along relational lines. What we have discovered is that where churches are exploding with life change, the people are connecting with the message of the gospel through relationships. It is not unusual for the most effective evangelists to need evangelizing themselves. Like the woman at the well who brings her entire village to meet Jesus, entire households and neighborhoods are showing up at these churches that break the [missional] code.

If the late twentieth century experienced individual conversion, the early twenty-first century has swung the pendulum back, and we are once again seeing entire households being evangelized, similar to the New Testament model.⁴

Desiring to be birthed organically along pre-existing relational lines, Metanoia made the missional decision to rely on relationships as the primary means of invitation for all aspects of church life.

Thus, as a church of "missionaries sent by God," Metanoia chooses not to conduct crowd-gathering evangelistic events, but rather opts to volunteer for established citywide festivals and events so that believers serve alongside non-believers and establish relationships. Metanoia also leverages the rental space in which Worship Gatherings are held to host community events for believers and non-believers alike. As a result, Metanoia has grown slowly, but deeply with rich relational connections within and without the church.

⁴ Ed Stetzer and David Putman, *Breaking the Missional Code: Your Church Can Become a Missionary in Your Community*, (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2006), 84.

In the fall of 2009, many within the church began sensing that the initial church-planting phase was coming to a close for a few specific reasons: three of the original five-person church planting team had moved or were moving on to other ministries, Metanoia was preparing to commission her first Elders and participation within the church was growing. In response, Metanoia Partners began to explore a fresh vision for the church. The leadership initiated a refocusing process involving all covenant Partners called “2010 Refocusing and Refining.” At its conclusion, a vision was collectively discerned and celebrated at the annual spring Partnership Retreat in March 2010.⁵ The vision reflects Metanoia’s missional philosophy and ministry:

We desire to make and grow as disciples of Jesus Christ by...

...conforming our lives to Jesus and his desires by his power, with the result that we express greater love for God and one another, experience increased victory over sin and enjoy greater confidence and contentment in the Lord.

...equipping individuals to minister in the name of Jesus Christ with the result that the communities where we live, work and play become places of hope, healing and justice.

...seeking the transformation of the spiritual, business and artistic life of Historic Ellicott City through our presence with the result that Jesus Christ is increasingly recognized as Lord and sought as the true source of spiritual vitality.

...partnering long-term with like-minded churches and organizations with the result that churches meeting the spiritual and physical needs of their communities are planted in a variety of cultures.⁶

The first three vision points indicate that Partners believe the Holy Spirit is leading the church to experience spiritual transformation on personal and community levels. This

⁵ Adam Feldman, “2010 Refocusing and Refining,” Metanoia Church, <http://metanoiachurch.org/?p=496> (accessed June 16, 2011). A detailed description of the process described above is found on Metanoia’s website.

⁶ Metanoia Church, “Our Vision,” Metanoia Church, http://metanoiachurch.org/?page_id=632 (accessed August 12, 2010).

vision requires a missional expression of spiritual formation that takes place where people “live, work and play.”

Metanoia’s Missional Structure: Worship Gathering, Community Groups and Metanoia U

From late 2007 to summer 2010, the ministry structure at Metanoia Church consisted of three environments: weekly Worship Gathering for the purpose of the ministry of the Word and for corporate worship, monthly Community Groups (CGs) for the purpose of decentralized mission efforts and weekly Life Transformation Groups (LTGs) for the purpose of spiritual formation. The typical week for a Metanoia Partner included the Worship Gathering on Sunday and a mid-week small group environment that was either the weekly LTG or the monthly CG.

CGs were an entry-level ministry for non-believers, spiritual seekers and new believers. LTGs were subgroups of two-to-three people within each CG. Because of the depth of transparency and the high commitment level, LTGs were reserved for Partners or those intending to become a Partner with the church. Thus, a CG might have twelve participants while only seven or eight of them would be involved in that CG’s LTGs.

This particular ministry structure facilitated Metanoia’s growth from eleven Partners when the LTG program debuted in late 2007 to twenty-nine Partners in early 2010. Growth by addition was the norm for Metanoia during this season primarily because of the decision to rely upon relational evangelism described above. While growth was relatively slow, new participants connected with Metanoia connected through pre-existing relationships that bolstered their involvement in the broader church community.

As more people connected, the growth rate began to snowball, and by summer 2010 the church began to grow at a quicker pace than previously experienced. At the same time, the church leadership noticed an atrophy of missional activity within CGs due to difficulties associated with coordinating mission efforts during a single monthly meeting. As a result of the 2010 Refocusing and Refining process and the observations described above, church leadership determined that a change in the ministry structure was necessary if any amount of exponential growth and missional activity was to be fostered beyond the current experience.

After three months of prayer and fasting, observation of current ministry trends and study of other missional churches that faced similar problems, the leadership determined in the summer of 2010 that the weekly LTG environment must be dropped from Metanoia's ministry system to foster decentralized missional activity through weekly CGs.

The decision to remove LTGs and focus on CGs as the primary week-to-week environment was predominantly missional. According to Stetzer and Putman, missional churches understand there are two conversions in becoming a disciple: "one temporal and one eternal." The temporal conversion is "conversion to community," or rather, connection within a church environment. The eternal conversion, "the conversion to Christ," occurs as a person "becomes part of the church."⁷ Prior to making the decision to eliminate weekly LTGs in favor of weekly CGs, the once-a-month CG was ineffective in facilitating conversion to community for spiritual seekers because monthly meetings could not foster consistent community exposure.

⁷ Stetzer, and Putman, *Missional Code*, 124.

A second reason LTGs were removed involves a missional understanding of discipleship. Stetzer and Putman describe discipleship as a process that begins prior to conversion. They give five principles of discipleship as process:

1. Discipleship begins prior to conversion.... [Conversion to Christ] will be part of the journey and will often require years of participation in a local congregation before a person goes public with his or her faith....
2. Discipleship involves participation in community prior to conversion. Churches that facilitate this journey will recognize the importance of relationships, the currency that moves the unreached/unchurched forward....
3. Discipleship often involves participation and experience prior to conversion. Churches that understand the discipleship process are also proactive about creating strategic and specific experiences for those who are on the journey. Each step toward the cross is celebrated as a victory....
4. Discipleship often involves participation in service prior to conversion. Churches that break the [missional] code recognize that God uses people to accomplish his purposes....
5. Discipleship often involves participation in missions prior to conversion....⁸

Metanoia needed to provide an environment where non-believers could be discipled into faith in Christ at their pace among believers. This necessitated weekly CG meetings.

Metanoia's current ministry structure, which launched in the fall of 2010, is positioned to facilitate a missional methodology of conversion and discipleship within three programming environments: weekly Worship Gathering, weekly CGs and periodic Metanoia U classes. The Worship Gathering continues to exist for the church to gather for adoration of the Lord Jesus through the ministry of the Word, ordinances, singing and prayer. CGs now exist as smaller groups through which the church weekly scatters for action to carry out the missional activity of the church and evangelize the lost. A new

⁸ Stetzer and Putman, *Missional Code*, 106.

program called Metanoia U was created to offer periodic classes that delve deeper into Christian practice and theology.⁹

Minetrea explains that missional churches like Metanoia “create multiple entry points through which the spiritual inquirer can begin the journey toward faith. In other words, missional churches are specialists at extending invitation.”¹⁰ Thus, Metanoia gathers for adoration through large group Worship Gatherings and scatters for action¹¹ by decentralizing the mission and ministry to where people live work and play.¹²

However, with the removal of LTGs an intentional pathway for spiritual formation is neglected in the current ministry structure. A brief history of the LTG program along with additional reasons LTGs were inadequate for Metanoia is given below. Prior to this, attention turns to understanding Metanoia’s context in Ellicott City.

Metanoia’s Missional Context: Ellicott City, Maryland

A central tenant to missional ministry is the contextualization of a church’s activity within a specific community. In *The Shaping of Things To Come*, missiologists Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch propose a definition of missional contextualization:

[Contextualization] can only be understood if we can first agree on some presuppositions. First, as proponents of contextualization, we believe that the core of the gospel is valid for all cultures and times. Second, however, we recognize that such a gospel must be clothed in time-specific cultural forms in order for it to be communicated and understood.

⁹ Metanoia Church, “Ministry,” Metanoia Church, http://metanoiachurch.org/?page_id=147 (accessed June 16, 2011). Metanoia’s current ministry structure is detailed online.

¹⁰ Minatrea, *Shaped By God’s Heart*, 24.

¹¹ Mark Driscoll, *Religion Saves: And Nine Other Misconceptions (Re:Lit)*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2009), 246-247. The concept for the two-fold missional movement of gathering for adoration and scattering for action is reflected in Driscoll’s work.

¹² Metanoia Church, “Connecting,” Metanoia Church, http://metanoiachurch.org/?page_id=1110 (accessed June 16, 2011).

Contextualization, then, can be defined as the dynamic process whereby the constant message of the gospel interacts with specific, relative human situations. It involves an examination of the gospel in the light of the respondent's worldview and then adapting the message, encoding it in such a way that it can become meaningful to the respondent.¹³

This definition applies to the totality of church life, which includes spiritual formation of disciples. Thus, understanding Metanoia's context in Ellicott City illumines the need for a missional approach to mission and ministry activities like spiritual formation.

The Missional Corps (TMC)¹⁴, a free online social network project of the Missional Suite of the Intercultural Institute for Contextual Ministry (IICM),¹⁵ provides cultural and demographic information by zipcode for churches interested in contextually proclaiming and living the gospel message. Information on zip codes is aggregated from eleven data collecting services, which include the Bureau of the Census, National Center for Health Statistics, Economic Research Service, Experian US, National Institutes of Health and ScanUS.¹⁶

In what follows, TMC statistical data is utilized to identify the factors affecting spiritual formation for two Ellicott City zip codes—21042 and 21043—and neighboring Catonsville zip code 21228. These three zip codes—collectively referred to hereafter as the Ellicott City area—constitute the region within which the majority of Metanoia Partners and participants live, work and play.

¹³ Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things To Come: Innovation and Mission for the 21st-Century Church*, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2003), 83.

¹⁴ Missional Corps, "The Missional Corps: A FREE Networking Resource from IICM for registered Christian believers," Missional Corps, <http://corps.iicm.net/~iicmnet/corps/elgg/> (accessed June 10, 2010).

¹⁵ Intercultural Institute for Contextual Ministry, "Home," Intercultural Institute for Contextual Ministry, <http://institute.iicm.net/index.php/Home> (accessed June 10, 2010).

¹⁶ Missional Corps, "Notes and Sources," Missional Corps, <http://corps.iicm.net/~iicmnet/corps/elgg/pg/iicm/notes> (accessed June 10, 2010).

While many factors influence contextualized ministry in the Ellicott City area, three factors are considered for the purposes of this thesis-project. These factors are: the cultural diversity of, the spiritual strongholds within and the prevailing attitudes held by the population in the area. They are later considered in developing a formative curriculum in Chapter 5.

The first factor addressed is cultural diversity. According to TMC data, the Ellicott City area is discernibly more culturally diverse—and more Asian—than the national average. For instance, 79.57% of the national population is white. A TMC “My Ethnoscape” report for 21042 and 21043 indicates that 73.96% and 68.47% of the respective populations are white. In neighboring 21228, the percentage of the population that is white is even lower at 67.48%. The Asian population for 21042 and 21043 are 17.35% and 16.97% respectively, a number four times the national percentage of 4.56%. The Asian population is closer to the national average in 21228 at 7.19%, but the black population in that zip code is almost double the national average at 22.54% compared to 12.39% respectively. In all three zip codes the Hispanic population is approximately a fifth of the national average of 15.93%.¹⁷ As previously indicated in the Introduction to this chapter, the cultural diversity of the area is reflected in Metanoia.

The second factor considered in understanding context is the unique spiritual strongholds of the area: affluence and an aversion to evangelical faith. The first of these strongholds, affluence, is perhaps the most difficult to identify as it is often perceived as a virtue within the United States. CNN’s Money Magazine publishes an annual list of the one hundred “best places to live” in the USA. The list employs a metric that focuses on

¹⁷ Missional Corps, “My Ethnoscape: The Ethnic Topography of My Zip Code,” Missional Corps, <http://corps.iicm.net/~iicmnet/corps/elgg/pg/iicm/myethnoscape> (accessed on June 10, 2010 three times for 21042, 21043 and 21228 respectively).

community affluence such as average income, amenities, crime rate and unemployment rate. The implication of this list and others like it is that the relative comforts of affluence determines quality of life. To be without affluence is to be left off the list as a deficient community. Incidentally, Ellicott City ranked number two on Money Magazine's 2010 list.¹⁸ Ellicott City is also the county seat of Howard County, which according to a 2010 study conducted by Forbes.com is the third wealthiest county in the nation.¹⁹ Affluence abounds in the Ellicott City area.

A TMC "My Demoscope" report for 21042 indicates that 12.43% of the population earns an annual income of at least \$250,000, a percentage three times the national percentage of 4.06%. The same report from TMC also indicates that the population of the Ellicott City area is better educated than the national average. The national percentage of college educated adults ages 25 and older is 11.57% compared to that of 21042, 21043 and 21228: 22.35%, 21.18% and 17.15% respectively. The difference in the educational achievement between the national and Ellicott City area populations is even greater in graduate and professional degrees earned by adults 25 years old and older. The national percentage of persons holding such degrees is 6.73% while the percentage is two to three times higher at 22.6%, 17.02% and 11.92% in 21042, 21043 and 21228 respectively. These percentages do not include educational

¹⁸ Donna Rosato, "Best Places To Live: Money's List of America's Best Small Cities," CNNMoney.com, <http://money.cnn.com/magazines/moneymag/bplive/2010/snapshots/PL2419125.html> (accessed August 12, 2010).

¹⁹ Francesca Levy, "America's 25 Richest Counties: Howard County, MD," Forbes.com http://www.forbes.com/2010/03/04/america-richest-counties-lifestyle-real-estate-wealthy-suburbs_slide_24.html (accessed September 9, 2010).

achievements comparable to bachelor degrees and associate degrees, which further demonstrates a more educated population in the Ellicott City area.²⁰

While wealth and education are morally neutral, the sins of self-worship—self-dependence, self-effort, self-advancement, self-promotion, self-righteousness—and the pursuit of comfort at the expense of abundant life with Christ and meeting the needs of the poor often manifest in such affluent contexts (c.f. Mark 8:34-38). Contextualizing spiritual formation in an area where roughly two-thirds of the population is highly educated and wealthy must take seriously Jesus’ call to “love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind” (Matt 22:37 ESV) if it is to challenge new believers within the local population to “metanoia.”

A second spiritual stronghold is an aversion to evangelical faith. A TMC “My Evangelscape” report on the area shows that between 69.69% and 75.81% of the population are currently unreached, meaning that they “do not consider themselves to be an evangelical Christian.” TMC defines an evangelical Christian as “a person who professes to have accepted Jesus Christ as his or her personal Lord and Savior.” Of those who are unreached, between 41.29% and 46.40% are “not interested” in evangelical spirituality or religion.²¹

While almost half of the population would not consider becoming an evangelical Christian at this time, a third of the population is open to spiritual and religious practices in general. Adherents to world religions and other non-Christian religious groups make up 15.23% to 18.09% of the population. Persons who consider themselves spiritual but

²⁰ Missional Corps, “My Demoscape: The Social Topography of My Zip Code,” Missional Corps, <http://corps.iicm.net/~iicmnet/corps/elgg/pg/iicm/mydemoscape> (accessed on June 10, 2010).

²¹ Missional Corps, “My Evangelscape: The Spiritual Topography of My Zip Code,” Missional Corps, <http://corps.iicm.net/~iicmnet/corps/elgg/pg/iicm/myevangelscape> (accessed June 10, 2010).

not religious—those involved in pagan spiritualities and new age movements—make up an additional 10.31% to 12.62% of the population.²² While some persons may not be open to evangelical Christian faith, there remains an open door for those who are open to spiritual things in general.

The third factor affecting spiritual formation in the area is the prevailing attitudes of the area. The first is social activism. According to TMC data, the national percentages of persons who vote in elections, recycle and volunteer are 44.68%, 35.07% and 16.87% respectively. Persons living in 21042 are 25% more likely to vote, 43% more likely to recycle and 50% more likely to volunteer than that of the national average.²³ Such social activism is consistent with the mission of God to redeem individuals, culture and creation (c.f. Rom 8:18-30).

As Frost and Hirsch explain, social activism is a missional aspect of spiritual formation:

We need to recover the kind of worldview that can awaken our deepest passions and give us a redemptive framework and fund an inner meaning for our activities in the world on God's behalf. It won't be good enough merely to get better techniques and methods. Even incarnation and contextualization won't suffice unless we can find the spiritual framework and resources for real and lasting engagement. In fact, what is required is a spirituality of engagement, as modeled for us in Christ. Such incarnation cannot occur without a sustaining and energizing spirituality. Spirituality has for so long been the domain of a type of mysticism that has sought God apart from a real engagement with the world.... At its worst such otherworldliness has led people away from missional interaction in the world to a view that God is best served far away from people and things.²⁴

Emphasis on spiritually formative activism will likely be accepted among new believers.

²² Missional Corps, "My Evangelscape."

²³ Missional Corps, "Shared Projects: The Connectional Topography of My Zip Code," Missional Corps, <http://corps.iicm.net/~iicmnet/corps/elgg/mod/IICM/projects.php> (accessed June 10, 2010). In comparing 21042 to the national average, the percentages for voting are 55.75% versus 44.68%, 50.13% versus 35.07% for recycling and 25.24% versus 16.87% for volunteering, respectively.

²⁴ Frost and Hirsch, *Shaping of Things*, 111-112.

A second prevailing attitude is one of tolerance for beliefs and practices that differ from one's own. TMC data shows that on average, 61.74% of the nation believes that it is "important to respect customs and beliefs." In 21043, 70.64% of persons agree with that statement and in 21042 that percentage is even higher at 75.53%.²⁵ The national average of persons who will "speak my mind even if it upsets people" is 34.38%. Persons in 21042 are less willing to challenge another person's beliefs and practices as only 29.32% resonate with that statement.²⁶ This attitude of tolerance is an open door for sharing the gospel through stories of personal transformation experienced as a believer is formed in the image of Christ.

The third prevailing attitude of the area is psychological disorders associated with stress. According to TMC, 65-69% of persons living in the Ellicott City area suffered from acid reflux disease in 2009. Regarding psychological disorders diagnosed in 2009, 6-8% of the population in the area was diagnosed with depression and 5-8% was diagnosed with anxiety disorder.²⁷ These percentages represent a large number of persons formally diagnosed with these psychological disorders in the area. Kiplinger's lists Ellicott City as number one of ten "Great Cities for Raising Families" and reports the population at 56,397 in 2010.²⁸ This means that up to 4,512 people in this "Great City for Raising Families" are struggling with depression and another 4,512 with anxiety. Household income and education may be higher than the national average, but affluence

²⁵ Missional Corps, "Cultural Themes: The Connectional Topography of My Zip Code," Missional Corps, <http://corps.iicm.net/~iicmnet/corps/elgg/pg/iicm/themes> (accessed June 10, 2010).

²⁶ Missional Corps, "Cultural Barriers: The Connectional Topography of My Zip Code," Missional Corps, <http://corps.iicm.net/~iicmnet/corps/elgg/pg/iicm/barriers> (accessed June 10, 2010).

²⁷ Missional Corps, "Needscape: The Issues Topography of My Zip Code," Missional Corps, <http://corps.iicm.net/~iicmnet/corps/elgg/pg/iicm/needscape> (accessed June 10, 2010).

²⁸ Caitlin Dewey, "10 Great Cities for Raising Families," The Kiplinger Washington Editors, <http://www.kiplinger.com/features/archives/10-great-cities-for-raising-families.html> (accessed September 9, 2010).

has not made the population less stressed. Spiritual formation that draws people into contemplative disciplines like prayer, meditation, silence, solitude and Sabbath observance could heal soul, body and mind.

The Problem Addressed:

The Need for a Spiritual Formation Assessment of Metanoia Church

The ministry restructuring carried out to realize the 2010 vision created a programmatic void in the area of spiritual formation. However, such a deficit was not always the case for Metanoia. What follows is a description of the previous spiritual formation mechanism: LTGs. Also detailed are four concerns with LTGs as they were employed at Metanoia, which influenced the leadership to remove them from the ministry structure. The section concludes with a statement of the problem addressed by this thesis-project.

Metanoia's Previous Spiritual Formation Tool: Life Transformation Groups (LTGs)

Metanoia's LTGs were an adaptation of Neil Cole's methodology for spiritual formation in missional communities presented in *Cultivating a Life for God*.²⁹ For Metanoia, LTGs were small groups of two to three persons of the same gender who met weekly to hold one another accountable for three things: engaging Scripture through

²⁹ Neil Cole, *Cultivating a Life for God: Multiplying Disciples Through Life Transformation Groups*, (St. Charles, IL: ChurchSmart Resources, 1999), 63ff.

weekly reading and application of the sermon, prayer for lost persons and accountability questions for character development.

The LTG meeting process was printed on a bookmark and distributed to each group member. The bookmark listed questions in three different categories to keep one another accountable for the three purposes of LTG. The LTG bookmark questions were:

Biblical Truth

- How did God speak to you through this week's sermon? What are you going to do about it?
- Did you finish the [LTG] reading this week? What did God say, and what are you going to do about it?

Character Questions

- Have you sought significance in any thing or person other than Christ?
- Have you given in to any addictive behavior or line of thinking?
- Have you honored God in the use of your finances and other resources?
- Have you allowed sin to affect any relationship?
- Have you fully honored God with your sexuality?
- Did you devote the proper quantity and quality of time to relationships and tasks, according to their priority?
- Have you been completely honest with me/us?

Missional Living

- How have you sought to embody and proclaim the gospel to [the people on our prayer list] this week?
- What did you learn from this?³⁰

Depending on the LTG make up, progressing through the questions could take anywhere from forty-five minutes to two hours.

One advantage of the LTG format was the relational aspect of spiritual formation—a key element to organic discipleship in a missional church setting as described by Stetzer and Putman above. One way this manifested was in the flexibility of

³⁰ Scott Feldman, "LTG Bookmark," Metanoia Church, <http://metanoiachurch.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/08/LTG-Card-default-v1.1.pdf> (accessed September 3, 2010). The LTG card is adapted from Neil Cole's questions presented in *Cultivating A Life for God*.

scheduling meetings. If an LTG member were sick, out of town or unable to attend for any other reason, the LTG could usually reschedule for another time during the week because the schedules of only two or three persons were involved. Flexibility also ensured that LTGs could meet anywhere and at any time. At its peak, the LTG program at Metanoia consisted of groups that met in homes, coffee shops, restaurants, bars and workplaces on every day of the week.

A second advantage was each LTG's control over the Scripture diet for the group. Cole encourages readings to be sections of Scripture that range from four to ten chapters in length and are read multiple times until twenty-five to thirty chapters are read weekly. For instance, if an LTG decides to read the book of Galatians—a six chapter book of the Bible—the LTG might read it four or five times over the course of the week. If any of the group members does not finish the weekly reading, it is not viewed as a failure. The group assumes that the Holy Spirit is not yet done speaking to the group members through that Scripture. The group then returns to the same reading plan for the next week and continues this process until each member of the group returns to the meeting having completed the reading. When all LTG members arrive having completed the reading, the group then determines their next reading assignment.

Cole explains the advantage to reading Scripture in the LTG format as follows:

This form of accountability is a breath of fresh air in this highly segregated and individualistic society we live in. A major weakness of the Western church is the independent and individualistic approach to spiritual development. In the Eastern world, the ideas of family and community are stronger.... The LTG's, in Biblical fashion, operate naturally in community. We stay together. We learn together. We move forward together....³¹

³¹ Cole, *Cultivating*, 68.

Some Metanoia LTGs worked their way through the New Testament, others through the minor prophets and others chose readings by discerning the needs within the LTG.

Four Concerns with Life Transformation Groups (LTGs)

In addition to the missional concerns mentioned above, there were four concerns that influenced the decision to remove LTGs from the ministry structure. The first concern was the involvement of new believers in a group that required a tremendous amount of transparency. Cole addresses this concern, and his comments are quoted at length to understand his approach to LTGs as missional discipleship tool:

It is true that the LTG system has a high commitment level for a ground floor entry point to the church. Many, if not most, church growth philosophies today try to lower the level of commitment up front so as to attract more people and hopefully woo them into Christianity gradually. They treat the salvation of people as a step-by-step gradual process, which is true. But it is my belief that we can sometimes sabotage our message by cheapening the strength of the truth we embrace. If it is true, then it should be true at every level and have strength at every level, even the entry point.

I think that the lost of the world will respond well to truth that we embrace wholeheartedly and do not compromise in any way. We are in a day when it is important to call sin, sin and truth, truth! I have found that lost people who want to be saved respond well to authentic lives willing to admit their need for forgiveness and grace. I have found in my experience that those who need their lives changed thrive in a safe place where others are willing to openly confess their own deficiencies. In fact, it is when we hide this authenticity from the world, and pretend to be better than we are, that the world takes offense at our hypocrisy and rejects our message.³²

While some new believers in Metanoia were indeed attracted to such relationships, the church also experienced the very problem Cole seeks to alleviate through LTGs: the fact that some new believers do not feel comfortable in such an intense environment.

³² Cole, *Cultivating*, 97.

To alleviate this concern, Metanoia leadership decided that only Partners or persons intending to become Partners could join an LTG. One experience that precipitated this requirement occurred when a new believer joined an LTG and was subsequently overwhelmed by the commitment level of the group. LTG was too much for her to wrap her mind around—she was just not prepared for someone to ask her about her sexuality, nor was she ready to read thirty chapters of Scripture each week.

Another reason for limiting LTG involvement to Partners or soon-to-be Partners is that the LTG format assumes at least one person in the group has a solid knowledge of Scripture and can help new believers understand the reading. Anticipating this concern, Cole argues that one strength of LTGs is that books of the Bible are read in context, thus LTG members grow in their knowledge of the Scriptures by reading them in context:

Because the believers are reading entire books of the Bible in context, natural checks and balances are inherent within each group. People in the group are less likely to be led astray because they are reading the same Scripture themselves. Not only is each disciple reading the same Scripture in context but is indwelt by the author—the Holy Spirit.³³

Cole's emphasis on the role of the Holy Spirit in instructing the disciple is critical to understanding the value he places on the role of the Word in LTGs.

Cole admits, "Of course there is no way to completely eliminate the threat of heresy, but this is a very effective way to reduce it."³⁴ While heresy was a concern of Metanoia's leadership, it was not the primary concern with the LTG format in regard to new believers. The primary concern was that no clear discipling process to pass on the fundamentals of the faith was built into the LTG. Thus, some LTG participants were for the most part at a loss of how to instruct new believers in foundational knowledge of the

³³ Cole, *Cultivating*, 101.

³⁴ Cole, *Cultivating*, 101.

faith. If Metanoia were to provide an opportunity for a new believer to grow in her faith at an appropriate pace, the LTG would not meet this need.

A second concern dealt with the LTG method of multiplication. According to Cole, when LTGs add a fourth person, they are required to split into two groups of two within four weeks. Cole says this is not arbitrary:

While a community can be a larger group than three, a group of three can be the strongest form of community. For most, it is difficult to have the kind of close-knit relational bond that can change our life with more than three people at any one time. The best context for a life-changing community is in a group of two or three.

Three, in fact, is the ideal number for a group to experience real growth through community. With a group of three it is harder for one person to dominate the discussion (though not impossible). It is also harder for someone to hide in a group of three. It is easier to have full participation from all in a group of only three, but as the size of the group increases, some become more outspoken and others fade into the background.³⁵

In addition to these sociological and spiritual reasons to limit the LTG to two or three persons, Cole states that there are certain missional principles associated to limiting the group size so that multiplication occurs at the level of individual disciples:

...there is not a single command to plant a church or to multiply small groups [in the Bible]. There is a lot of church planting and multiplying of groups going on in the New Testament, but not because the church was instructed to do so. The reason that groups and churches multiplied is because the first generation of Christians were obeying a very specific and simple command—to make disciples! When Christians are obedient to this single command, it results in the multiplying of groups and churches. To attempt to multiply groups and churches without multiplying disciples is not only disobedient, but it is downright impossible.

Many are very intentional about multiplying groups and churches, assuming that disciple-making will result, but the results are less than effective. This is Biblically backwards! The truth is that only when we become intentional about making and multiplying disciples can we be assured that groups and churches will multiply.³⁶

³⁵ Cole, *Cultivating*, 50.

³⁶ Cole, *Cultivating*, 93.

Although LTGs provide an avenue for multiplication to occur at the level of individual disciples, there are some negative consequences that Cole neglects.

For instance, while only a few Metanoia LTGs multiplied, some persons experienced several LTG multiplications. Two issues emerged as a result. First, there was a general sense of dissatisfaction with leaving persons with whom the joys and frustrations of life and the matters of sinful bondage had been shared. Secondly, there was a noticeable drop in the level of transparency in confession of sin. One believer who was involved in several LTG multiplications admitted that after confessing his deepest secrets to nine different men, he experienced a dramatic decrease in his willingness to be transparent. This methodological problem was further agitated as LTGs assimilated more people in the midst of more rapid church-wide growth.

The third concern with how LTGs were employed at Metanoia also became evident as the church growth rate increased. As more people began attending the Worship Gathering, a bottleneck occurred that left most of them disconnected from any sort of group life for weeks at a time until a monthly CG met. For instance, at one point in August 2010, close to one-third of those who participated in the Worship Gathering were not connected to any small group environment. Because they were neither Partners nor on the “Pathway to Partnership”³⁷ they had no way of connecting at a deeper relational level other than a once-a-month CG meeting. The burden of assimilating new believers and non-believers into a monthly CG meeting meant less time preparing for missional activity and more time facilitating relational connections. Metanoia simply could not adequately

³⁷ Metanoia Church, “Pathway to Partnership,” Metanoia Church, http://metanoiachurch.org/?page_id=177 (accessed June 16, 2011).

assimilate new attendees quickly enough while maintaining an intentionally decentralized outward missional focus.

These concerns are admittedly unique to Metanoia's adaptation of Cole's LTGs. Metanoia treated LTGs as a program, whereas Cole never intended them as such. He recommends beginning groups "more organically than organizationally." Cole elaborates:

... [one] reason why LTG's may not succeed in some churches is because they are implemented as a program instead of a grass roots system. Pastors, eager to find a solution to ministry demands, sometimes will apply this system as a blanket program for everyone, often assigning accountability partners. This approach goes directly against many of the values and principles shared in this book.... The system works much better if natural relationships are formed and the influence of LTG's is allowed to develop organically....

He warns those who adapt or change the LTG system as it is presented it in the book:

"You may choose to adapt and change some of the methodology because you don't buy in to all my values, or have some others that you need to take into account. That is fine; just realize that these principles work and the more you diminish them, the more you diminish the results."³⁸ Metanoia experienced such difficulties with adapting the LTG system as a program.

For Cole, LTGs must be taken as an all-or-nothing methodology for spiritual formation in missional churches. While following Cole's format exactly may address the concern of assimilation mentioned above, the format does not address the first two concerns: discipling new believers and frustration with multiplication. Additionally, Cole's argument that the principles and values set forth in his book are universal is weakened if the only way that proposition is proved valid is by reproducing the LTG process exactly as presented.

³⁸ Cole, *Cultivating*, 107, 113.

The fourth and greatest concern with LTGs was that no clear metric for spiritual formation existed to assess personal or corporate spiritual growth. In the first seven chapters of *Cultivating a Life for God*, Cole states over and over again that the desired goal of LTGs is not to complete the reading or to eliminate sin, but to experience grace-empowered life transformation. He is adamant that processes and disciplines alone do not produce life transformation:

Hear me when I say that it is not the methodology that transforms lives, it is only the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ applied to a needy soul by the Holy Spirit. The methodology is only helpful in that it brings the desperate sinner into prolonged contact with God and His word in the context of community with others who are also pursuing God.³⁹

Despite this assertion, the LTG format as Cole presents it does not provide any metric of life transformation outside of the weekly questions.

In a survey conducted with all Partners in November 2009, the benefits of LTGs were viewed as accountability for both dealing with sinful habits and intentional Scripture reading. The survey revealed that only two Partners of those surveyed associated “prayer for the lost” as a purpose of LTGs, and by extension, spiritual formation. Despite Cole’s clearly espoused purposes for LTGs, Metanoia experienced a reductionism of spiritual formation to sin management and Scripture reading. Additionally, entire swaths of classic spiritual disciplines—such as fasting, solitude, meditation, silence, spiritual direction and journaling—are essentially ignored by Cole. Metanoia’s leadership was concerned that LTGs placed the church in danger of conditioning future Partners to such reductionism.

³⁹ Cole, *Cultivating*, 9.

The Problem Addressed

The problem addressed by this thesis-project is the lack of an intentional spiritual formation curriculum within Metanoia to help new believers and veteran saints on their journey to be formed into the image of Christ. “Curriculum” in this thesis-project refers to a pathway, a big picture process by which a student becomes proficient in a specific discipline.⁴⁰ In regards to this thesis-project, the students are disciples of Jesus and the discipline is spiritual formation.

In *And: The Gathered and Scattered Church*, Hugh Halter and Matt Smay say that the lack of an intentional spiritual formation pathway is one of the “three most common spiritual formation blunders” in missional churches. In their words, the problem is “simply not having any formation process at all.” On this point, Halter and Smay say “it’s alarming how many churches act as though people will just become like Jesus through osmosis or through a sermon they have heard.” They further point out that assimilation, while important, “is not the same as spiritual formation.”⁴¹ With real hearts and souls on the line, this is a serious indictment on Metanoia’s current ministry structure. At stake is whether or not believers within Metanoia are aided and guided in their journeys to grow in the image of Christ and to bear that image in a dark, lost and watching world.

A spiritual formation assessment of Metanoia will bring clarity to three current unknown spiritual formation realities in Metanoia. First, it is uncertain in what ways Metanoia is already effectively facilitating spiritual formation for persons within the church community. To say that Metanoia does not have an intentional spiritual formation

⁴⁰ Merriam-Webster, Inc., “Curriculum,” Merriam-Webster, Inc., <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/curriculum> (accessed July 29, 2011).

⁴¹ Hugh Halter and Matt Smay, *And: The Gathered and Scattered Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 97, 99.

curriculum is not to say that the church does not engage in spiritually formative practices. It would prove helpful to know in what ways the Worship Gathering, preaching, weekly CG Bible study and weekly CG missional activity are helping the church community be formed in the image of Christ.

Along these lines, Metanoia has never conducted a spiritual formation assessment outside of sporadic, informal information gathering by the leadership. There is no baseline from which Metanoia can evaluate spiritual formation growth or atrophy among those within the church. Nor is there a metric from which Metanoia can evaluate spiritual formation praxis and knowledge.

Lastly, the current spiritual needs within the church community are largely unidentified. Without knowing what current needs exist, any spiritual formation curriculum would be hit-or-miss in meeting them. Additionally, as Metanoia has a uniquely diverse demographic and an equally unique cultural context in Ellicott City, meeting the spiritual formation needs will require equally unique curriculum.

Thesis-project:

Addressing the Spiritual Formation Needs of a New Church:

Current Realities, Future Opportunities and Formative Curriculum

Metanoia is in need of an assessment of spiritual needs and realities so that an intentional, missional approach to spiritual formation can be developed. Thus, the thesis of this Doctor of Ministry project is “Addressing the Spiritual Formation Needs of a New Church: Current Realities, Future Opportunities and Formative Curriculum.”

Project Design: Conducting a Spiritual Formation Assessment of Metanoia Church

The first phase of this thesis-project is to gather data to assess current spiritual formation realities through a church-wide spiritual formation survey. Adele Calhoun's "Spiritual Growth Planner"⁴² survey from her *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook* is utilized to assess the current spiritual formation realities. Additional questions are added to the survey to gather demographic data—such as gender, age, level of church participation and length of time as a believer. A representation of Metanoia Partners are interviewed in two focus groups to gather qualitative data regarding current spiritual formation practices and the perceived spiritual formation needs and strengths of the church. This data adds nuances to the data gathered on the survey. The research methodology is elaborated and results recorded in Chapter 4.

Discovering Current Realities: Analyzing Data

Chapter 5 analyzes, interprets and draws upon the research data gathered and recorded in Chapter 4 to design formative curriculum for Metanoia. The first section of Chapter 5 analyzes the data for current realities of spiritual formation. Understanding the current realities helps determine future opportunities for spiritual formation. Three research questions are asked:

RQ 1: What are the current spiritual formation needs at Metanoia Church?

RQ 2: What are the current spiritual formation strengths at Metanoia?

RQ 3: What are Metanoia participants currently doing to grow spiritually?

⁴² Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices That Transform Us* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 256-263.

Determining Future Opportunities: Interpreting Data

The second section of Chapter 5 interprets the data to build bridges between current realities and formative curriculum. Three research questions are asked:

RQ 4: What are the opportunities for improvement in spiritual formation at Metanoia?

RQ 5: What are the challenges for effective spiritual formation at Metanoia?

RQ 6: What are some of the aspects of Christian spiritual formation that need to be taught in order to educate the Metanoia community in spiritual formation?

Identifying future opportunities maximizes Metanoia's current strengths and shores up the gaps and weaknesses in spiritual formation.

Designing Formative Curriculum: Contextualization and Theological Application

Chapters 2 and 3 of this thesis-project present the author's theological framework for Christian spiritual formation in dialogue with other authors. This framework is a reflection upon what Scripture—specifically the Sermon on the Mount—says about the Holy Spirits' transformation of the Christian into the image of Christ. Classic and contemporary works on spiritual formation are included to expand the language of this particular theological framework and root it in the more than two thousand years of church history. Chapter 5 of this thesis-project combines data gathered and recorded in Chapter 4 with the spiritual formation theology and implications identified in Chapters 2 and 3 to create a contextualized, missional spiritual formation curriculum.

Halter and Smay describe spiritual formation “as becoming like Jesus instead of just knowing about Jesus.” They argue that a missional understanding of spiritual

formation “provide[s] a pathway for their [the disciples’] spiritual development along the way of real life instead of just giving a weekly call to ‘do better.’” The result is a process that “call[s] for change, challenge[s] the status quo, and guide[s] people through the tension of being counter-culture kingdom people.”⁴³ The thesis-project culminates in Chapter 5 with a curriculum based upon contextual data, theological conviction and programmatic implementation, which is right in line with Halter and Smay’s understanding of missional spiritual formation.

Summary: Purposes of the Thesis-Project

The primary purpose of this thesis-project is to assess and meet the spiritual formation needs of Metanoia so that Partners and participants are provided with an intentional, contextual and missional curriculum to grow in the image of Christ. Related goals of this thesis-project are for persons within the Metanoia community to experience Holy Spirit empowered transformation that comes in “putting on Christ” (c.f. Rom 13:14). The related anticipated outcome is that Metanoia clearly expresses a deepening spiritual transformation in Christ that overflows into a visible witness to the world.

Two secondary purposes of this thesis-project are to meet the requirements of Doctor of Ministry (D.Min.) research in the area of “Spiritual Formation for Ministry Leaders” at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary and to produce a substantial work of scholarship that benefits the global Christian church in understanding Christian spiritual formation within both a new church and other churches that adopt missional strategies. The hope of this author, church planter and founding pastor is to offer this piece of

⁴³ Halter and Smay, *Gathered and Scattered*, 94-95.

academic scholarship as both an act of worship of Jesus Christ and of love for fellow Christian brothers and sisters in ministry.

With a clear understanding of the missional context of Metanoia Church as well as the purpose, goals and anticipated outcomes of this D.Min. thesis-project, attention now turns to developing a spiritual theology in Chapter 2.

CHAPTER 2

INTERPRETING THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT WITHIN A THEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK FOR CHRISTIAN SPIRITUAL FORMATION

When Jesus saw his ministry drawing huge crowds, he climbed a hillside.
Those who were apprenticed to him, the committed, climbed with him.
Arriving at a quiet place, he sat down and taught his climbing companions.
This is what he said...

— Matthew 5:1-2 (The Message)

Lead me to the truth and I will follow you with my whole life.

— Mumford & Sons, “White Blank Page”

Toward a Spiritual Theology

This chapter begins with an introduction to the author’s theological framework for spiritual formation. Following this introduction is an argument for reading the Sermon on the Mount (Sermon) as a spiritually formative text. The Sermon is then interpreted within the author’s theological framework in order to highlight implications for spiritual formation found within the Biblical text. Concepts developed in this chapter are utilized in Chapter 5 to develop formative curriculum for Metanoia.

A Journey Into the Heart of God

As the Lead Pastor of Metanoia, the author is primarily responsible for discerning the preaching diet for the church. In 2007, he determined that a preaching series through the Gospel of Matthew would anchor new believers in foundational aspects of the Christian faith, while at the same time challenge and encourage veteran saints in the church. In early January 2008, the author reached Matthew 5 in the preaching series and found that due to its density and depth, the Sermon would require more time to preach through than previously anticipated. For example, for his first sermon on Matthew 5-7, the author merely read the entirety of the Biblical text in order to allow Jesus to “preach” the Sermon to the congregation. Seven months later, the author finished preaching through Matthew 5-7 and continued on with the Matthew series.

In the process of preaching through the Sermon, the author made numerous observations on how the text applies to spiritual formation. For instance, he noticed foundational truths about Father’s loving relationship to his children, the authority of Jesus Christ to call believers to obedience and the role of spiritual disciplines in formation. The author concluded that utilizing the Sermon to teach foundational truths and practices for spiritual formation in a more diverse and intentional way beyond a preaching series would benefit Metanoia for years to come. This inspired the author to pursue a D.Min. in spiritual formation.

Upon entering the D.Min. program in early 2009, the author learned there was more to spiritual formation than simply teaching the right things and practicing spiritual disciplines. Most notably, during the first D.Min. residency, the author discovered the importance of establishing a theological foundation upon which rests all spiritual

formation activities from personal endeavors to corporate curriculum. This foundation is referred to as a “spiritual theology” in this and the following chapter. What follows below is the author’s theological framework formed over the course of his D.Min. studies.

A Spiritual Theology Framework

The theological framework consists of five aspects of Christian spiritual formation: the locus, goal, authority, means and context of Christian spiritual formation. These aspects form the theological underpinnings of how a believer grows and matures in his faith in Christ. They are uniquely Christian because the Person and work of Christ define all five aspects.

The locus of Christian spiritual formation is the gospel: the message or “good news” of Christ and his kingdom. The goal is the believer formed *imago Christi*—in the image of Christ—through inner, outer and relational transformation. The authority is the written Word of God: Scripture that is inspired by the living Word of God, Christ. The means of formation are spiritual disciplines undertaken in partnership with the indwelling presence of Christ through the Holy Spirit. The community of Christ followers, the church, is the context of spiritual formation.

All five of these aspects are reflected within the Sermon. Thus, this chapter applies the framework introduced above for a formative interpretation of the Sermon as a means of presenting the author’s spiritual theology. Chapter 3 brings into dialogue additional Scripture as well as classic and contemporary Christian writings pertaining to

spiritual formation in order to deepen the dialogue over the theological framework as spiritual theology.

Understanding the Sermon on the Mount as a Spiritually Formative Text

The Sermon is a spiritually formative text because as Scripture it is the authoritative written Word of God. While this is a simple, objective statement for a formative reading of the Sermon, the author has subjective experience with the Sermon as a formative text. For instance, while preaching through the Sermon, one Metanoia Partner encouraged the author by saying that his preaching had become more “full” and “authoritative.” The author knew that this was because he allowed the Sermon to penetrate his soul and, in essence, to “preach” to him first. Thus, the author preached from a foundation of personal transformation.

Another way the author experienced the Sermon as a formative text involved his D.Min. research. Some content for this chapter was first presented in a required project following the first D.Min. residency. In researching that project, the author read multiple books on the Sermon by authors spanning the history of the church. The author was repeatedly challenged by these saints-of-old to resist the temptation to read the Sermon as merely a document to be researched and, instead, to be personally affected by its dynamic, formative nature. It encouraged the author to repeatedly read first hand accounts of how the Sermon facilitated the transformation of other believers and churches throughout history. This historical precedence affirmed the author’s conviction that the Sermon could be utilized in designing a formative curriculum for a church.

Jesus' expectations of his disciples in Matthew 5-7 necessitate a formative understanding of the Sermon. For instance, in Matthew 5:20, Jesus says, "For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven." Jesus then says, "You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt 5:48). Jesus further says in 7:24-27 "Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock.... And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand...." The demands of these verses require spiritual transformation in order to be lived.

D. A. Carson reflects on these demands of Christ in *Jesus' Sermon on the Mount*:

The more I read these three chapters—Matthew 5, 6, and 7—the more I am both drawn to them and shamed by them. Their brilliant light draws me like a moth to a spotlight; but the light is so bright that it sears and burns. No room is left for forms of piety which are nothing more than veneer and sham. Perfection is demanded. Jesus says, 'Be perfect...as your heavenly Father is perfect' (Matt 5:48).¹

Righteous perfection like Father's or righteousness that exceeds the scribes and Pharisees is possible through the spiritual transformation that comes through Christ. Thus, the Sermon is both a challenging description of life in Christ and a guide for how to live it.

Several classic and contemporary authors understand the Sermon as a spiritually formative text because of its call and guidelines to live righteously.² Augustine of Hippo

¹ D. A. Carson, *Jesus' Sermon on the Mount And His Confrontation with the World: An Exposition of Matthew 5-10* (Grand Rapids: BakerBooks, 2006), 11.

² Jeffrey P. Greenman, Timothy Larsen, and Stephen R. Spencer, eds, *The Sermon on the Mount Through the Centuries: From the Early Church to John Paul II* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2007). This work details how various well known Christians understood the Sermon. Their understanding of the formative nature of the Sermon is implied throughout the study. Persons included in the work are John Chrysostom, Augustine, Hugh of St. Victor, Dante, Chaucer, Martin Luther, John Calvin, John Wesley, Charles Haddon Spurgeon, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, John Howard Yoder, Pope John Paul II, Leonardo Boff and John R. W. Stott.

read the Sermon in this way and wrote the following in the introduction to his commentary on it:

If anyone will piously and soberly consider the sermon which our Lord Jesus Christ spoke on the mount, as we read it in the Gospel according to Matthew, I think that he will find in it, so far as regards the highest morals, a perfect standard of the Christian life: and this we do not rashly venture to promise, but gather it from the very words of the Lord Himself. For the sermon itself is brought to a close in such a way, that it is clear there are in it all the precepts which go to mould the life.³

In saying that “the precepts which go to mould the life” are found in the Sermon, Augustine affirms the text is spiritually formative.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s *The Cost of Discipleship* is an extended exposition on the Sermon. In introducing the Beatitudes (Matt 5:1-12), Bonhoeffer writes of Jesus’ intent for the Sermon to instruct his disciples:

Let us picture the scene: Jesus on the mountain, the multitudes, and the disciples. The people see Jesus with his disciples, who have gathered around him. Until quite recently these men had been completely identified with the multitude, they were just like the rest. Then came the call of Jesus, and at once they left all and followed him. Since then they have belonged to him, body and soul.... Disciples and [the crowd], they belong together. The disciples will be his messengers and here and there they will find men to hear and believe their message. Yet there will be enmity between them right to the bitter end. All the wrath of God’s people against [Jesus] and his Word will fall on his disciples; his rejection will be theirs....

Therefore Jesus calls his disciples blessed...⁴

Bonhoeffer emphasizes the text’s distinction between the crowds and the disciples, thus highlighting the Sermon’s unique purpose for Christian spiritual formation.

In *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*, D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones states that the Sermon “was preached primarily and specifically to the disciples.” He utilizes the images

³ Augustine, *Our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount*, 1.1.1.

⁴ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995), 105-106.

of salt and light in Matthew 5:13-16 to emphasize his point and to draw the conclusion that the Sermon is intended for Jesus' disciples:

If the Sermon on the Mount has nothing to do with Christian people now, we must never say that we are the salt of the earth, or that we are the light of the world, for that does not apply to us. It applied to the first disciples; it will apply to some people later on. But, in the meantime, it has nothing to do with us.... If the whole Sermon on the Mount is inapplicable to modern Christians, all that is irrelevant. But clearly our Lord was preaching to these men and telling them what they were to do in this world, not only while He was here, but after He had gone. It was preached to people who were meant to practise it at that time and even afterwards.⁵

Lloyd-Jones views the Sermon as intended for Christ's disciples past, present and future.

Lloyd-Jones also argues for a spiritually formative reading of the Sermon. He writes, "the great purpose of this Sermon is to give an exposition of the kingdom as something which is essentially spiritual." This is an internal spiritual reality because the "kingdom is primarily something 'within you.'" It is also an external reality because "that which governs and controls the heart and mind and outlook" overflows into deeds. Lloyd-Jones concludes that the Sermon "is how Christians ought to live; this is how Christians are meant to live."⁶ Thus, Christ intends for his disciples to live the Sermon in both heart and deed—a reality that necessitates both internal and external spiritual formation.

Martin Luther also understood the Sermon as a formative work that Christ intends for his disciples to live out. In the introduction to his commentary on the Sermon, Luther writes a prayer that emphasizes the role of grace in faithfully obeying the Sermon: "May Christ, our dear Lord and Master, who has opened up the true meaning [of the Sermon] for us, increase and strengthen it for us, and may He help us to live and act according to

⁵ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1976), 10.

⁶ Lloyd-Jones, *Studies*, 11-12.

it. To Him be praise and thanks, with the Father and the Holy Spirit forever. Amen.”⁷

Luther believes that by the power of God the Sermon can and must be lived out.

In sum, the Sermon is intended for Jesus’ disciples past, present and future to live and obey. Several classic and contemporary authors believe that the Sermon can only be lived out by God’s empowering grace. With this clear picture of the Sermon as a spiritually formative text, the remainder of this chapter demonstrates how the locus, goal, authority, means and context of Christian spiritual formation are found in Matthew 5-7.

Locus: Citizenship in the Kingdom of Heaven in Matthew 4:12-22; 5:1-2; 7:13-14, 21-29

The immediate Scriptural context of the Sermon is the accessibility of the kingdom of heaven in and through Jesus Christ (c.f. Matt 4:12-22). The Sermon itself serves as a manifesto on citizenship in the kingdom. The gospel, the locus of spiritual formation, is implied in Sermon because of the context consisting of Jesus’ annunciation of the gospel of the kingdom. It is impossible to enter the kingdom of heaven and to live a life that glorifies God apart from this gospel.

The Gospel of the Kingdom of Heaven

Understanding the gospel of the kingdom of heaven is central to a correct reading of the Sermon. In the opening chapters of Matthew’s Gospel, John the Baptizer is

⁷ Martin Luther, *The Sermon on the Mount (Sermons) and The Magnificat*, Luther’s Works, Vol. 21, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1956), 6.

baptizing people in the Jordan River. His message is simple: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matt 3:2). In Greek, the word translated “repent” is *metanoia*. *Metanoia* carries the meaning of walking in one direction, stopping, turning around and walking in the exact opposite direction. Since John is announcing that a new era in human history is beginning—the breaking in of the kingdom on earth—the appropriate response is repentance.

Carson gives four ways of understanding what the kingdom of heaven, also called the “kingdom of God,” refers to throughout the Old and New Testaments. First, it is “primarily dynamic rather than spatial,” meaning that it has no geographic borders to confine it.⁸ Earthly kingdoms are often thought of in terms of political and cultural borders. The kingdom of heaven is different in that it transcends all races and all lines on a map.

Second, the kingdom throughout Scripture often refers to God’s sovereign rule over all of creation.⁹ In a general sense, this means that every person and everything in all of creation has been, is and will always be under God’s rule. While this is true, John is not proclaiming the kingdom in this sense. If he were proclaiming a general presence of the kingdom, John would not implore people to prepare for its arrival with repentance.

According to Carson, John talks about the kingdom in a third way: the saving, life-giving nature of the kingdom. To prepare for the arrival of the kingdom is to prepare to enter into new life in, with and through Christ. Carson explains how Mark 9:45-47 demonstrates that one must enter into the kingdom to receive eternal life:

We get an idea what is meant when we compare Mark 9:45 and Mark 9:47. The first verse reads: “And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off.

⁸ Carson, *Jesus’ Sermon*, 11.

⁹ Carson, *Jesus’ Sermon*, 12.

It is better for you to *enter life* crippled, than to have two feet and be thrown into hell.” The second reads: “And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. It is better for you to *enter the kingdom of God* with one eye, than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell.” To enter the kingdom of God, then, is to enter life.¹⁰

Those who enter life in the kingdom live not only under God’s general sovereign reign over creation, but they also experience Jesus as Lord, his reign over their individual lives.

The kingdom is only accessible to those who through an act of repentance embrace salvation in Christ and discipleship to him (c.f. Matt 3:11; John 1:29-31, 34).

William Willimon and Stanley Hauerwas explain that the baptism of water and Spirit is the only boundary between citizenship of this world and citizenship of the kingdom. In their work on “The Lord’s Prayer” (Matt 6:5-15) entitled *Lord, Teach Us*, they write:

God’s kingdom’s boundaries obliterate all of the world’s false means of demarcation between human beings. Here is a kingdom open to all, with no consideration given for the world’s boundaries. Our boundary is baptism....

Baptism is a call to come be citizens of Israel, to become part of God’s weird way of saving the world. That weirdness is signified, exemplified, specified in the act of baptism itself. Baptism is Christian initiation.¹¹

Thus, the third way of understanding the kingdom—its life-giving nature—is available only to those who are spiritually baptized by the Spirit. This baptism and subsequent citizenship in the kingdom occurs at the moment of salvation through God’s justification.

The fourth way the kingdom is understood in Scripture is both as a present and a not yet reality, meaning that it has both already arrived and is yet to come.¹² In the section of the Sermon traditionally referred to as “The Lord’s Prayer,” Jesus instructs his disciples to pray for God’s kingdom to come and for his will to be done on earth as it is in

¹⁰ Carson, *Jesus’ Sermon*, 12.

¹¹ William H. Willimon and Stanley Hauerwas, *Lord, Teach Us: The Lord’s Prayer & the Christian Life* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 54.

¹² Carson, *Jesus’ Sermon*, 14.

heaven (c.f. Matt 6:10), thus indicating that some aspect of the kingdom has not yet arrived. However, later in Matthew 12:28, Jesus casts a demon out of a blind and mute man and says that his actions demonstrate the kingdom has already arrived.

In *The Gospel of the Kingdom*, George Eldon Ladd explains that the kingdom is “the realization of God’s will and the enjoyment of the accompanying blessings.” Ladd continues, “However, it is a clear teaching of the New Testament that God’s will is not to be *perfectly* realized in this age.”¹³ This is because the kingdom has already arrived with Jesus’ incarnation and yet it will arrive fully sometime in the future upon his return (c.f. 1 Cor 15:20-28).

According to Ladd, the gospel of the kingdom has direct impact on the lives of believers today, even though the kingdom will not come in its fullness until Christ’s second coming:

What is the Gospel of the Kingdom? What means the announcement that the Kingdom of God has come near? It is this: that God is now acting among men to deliver them from bondage to Satan. It is the announcement that God, in the person of Christ, is doing something—if you please, is attacking the very kingdom of Satan himself.

Ladd explains that because the kingdom has arrived, “We may taste its powers and thereby be delivered from This Age and no longer live in conformity to it.”¹⁴ This gospel of the kingdom is the context of the Sermon and subsequently reflects the locus of spiritual formation.

¹³ George Eldon Ladd, *The Gospel of the Kingdom: Scriptural Studies in the Kingdom of God* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1959), 24.

¹⁴ Ladd, *Kingdom*, 42, 47.

Manifesto for Citizenship in the Kingdom of Heaven

Like John the Baptizer, Jesus also proclaimed a message of preparation for entering the kingdom of heaven: “From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand’” (Matt 4:17). Unlike John, Jesus actually had the authority to bring people into the kingdom. In other words, Jesus’ message cannot be separated from Jesus as a Person.

In his book about the Sermon entitled *The Divine Conspiracy*, Dallas Willard explains the connection between the Person and message of Christ to the kingdom’s accessibility in this way: “Jesus’ own gospel of the kingdom was not that the kingdom was about to come, or had recently come, *into existence*. If we attend to what he actually said, it becomes clear that his gospel concerned only the new accessibility of the kingdom to humanity through himself.”¹⁵ The good news—or gospel—is that the kingdom of heaven is accessible through Jesus Christ.

Matthew places the Sermon early in Jesus’ ministry, indicating its foundational role in discipleship to Jesus in his kingdom. As seen in Matthew 5:1-2, the Sermon is intended for Jesus’ disciples (emphasis added): “Seeing the crowds, [Jesus] went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, *his disciples came to him*. And he opened his mouth and *taught them....*” These verses imply that Jesus preached the Sermon to his disciples to guide them in kingdom living and not to the general crowd of followers that was present to hear him teach that day.

This is not to say that Jesus ignored the crowd nor that he did not intend to minister to them. As Craig Blomberg points out in his commentary on Matthew, the

¹⁵ Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life In God* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1997), 26.

crowds are also an important part of Jesus' audience for they are listening to the Sermon and "will learn what genuine discipleship involves as they consider the possibility of commitment to Jesus."¹⁶ This implies an evangelistic overture to the Sermon. It is in hearing Jesus' Sermon that some may respond to Jesus' invitation into discipleship. The Sermon is therefore spiritually formative for the seeker who is receptive to the gospel.

An understanding of the Sermon as primarily intended for Jesus' disciples, but not at the expense of excluding spiritual seekers is missional. Metanoia's current ministry structure consists of an environment—the CG—in which believers in Jesus and spiritual seekers—the "crowd" of Matthew 5—dialogue together over Scripture. This format was designed, in part, after the author's reflection on Matthew 5:1-2.

As seen above, the content of the Sermon is primarily intended for Jesus' disciples, and it was his intention that they live it out. Willard states that Jesus' gospel "is a gospel *for life and Christian discipleship*." He explains that discipleship is a total-person experience that is rooted in being Jesus' "apprentice":

In other words, [Jesus'] basic message, 'Rethink your life in the light of the fact that the kingdom of the heavens is now open to all' (Matt. 4:17), presents the resources needed to live human life as we all automatically sense it should be and naturally leads one to become his student, or apprentice in kingdom living.

For Willard, the demands of discipleship are simple: "If I am Jesus' disciple that means *I am with him to learn from him how to be like him*."¹⁷ He implies that life in the kingdom is synonymous with discipleship to Christ.

Drawing on Matthew 7:13-27, Willard defines a disciple of Jesus in this way:

¹⁶ Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew*, The New American Commentary, Vol. 22., gen. editor David S. Dockery, (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992), 97.

¹⁷ Willard, *Divine Conspiracy*, 273-274, 276.

...a disciple, or apprentice, is simply someone who has decided to be with another person, under appropriate conditions, in order to become capable of doing what that person does or to become what that person is....

And as a disciple of Jesus I am with him, by choice and by grace, learning from him how to live in the kingdom of God.... I am not necessarily learning to do everything he did, but I am learning how to do everything I do in the manner that he did all that he did....

I am learning from Jesus how to lead *my* life, my *whole* life, my *real* life.¹⁸

The Sermon explains what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. Thus, it is a passage of Scripture through which a disciple can learn how to be formed in the image of Christ.

Prior to his D.Min. studies and subsequent deeper reflection on the Sermon, the author held an admittedly narrow and utilitarian view of the Sermon as “just” a manifesto. This is perhaps due to the fact that the author preached through the text and sought ways to apply the text to the lives of disciples in Metanoia. Upon further reflection, the author realized his spiritual theology must articulate the goal of such applications so that disciples see the big-picture of spiritual formation extending well beyond encouraged—or discouraged—behavior.

Goal: The Evidence of Transformation in Matthew 5:3-16; 6:19-34; 7:7-11

The goal of spiritual formation—the image of Christ expressed in inner, outer and relational transformation—is expressed in the Beatitudes and the images of salt and light in Matthew 5:3-16 in addition to the love relationship experienced between Father and the disciple in Matthew 6:19-34 and 7:7-11. The Beatitudes describe the inner quality of the disciple’s life in Christ, a life that is not natural to anyone apart from salvation. This

¹⁸ Willard, *Divine Conspiracy*, 282-283.

inner transformation billows outward as Jesus' disciples influence the world in a similar way that salt and light influence their surroundings. The relational transformation of the disciple occurs as he grows in a love relationship with Father. Much space is devoted to explaining the goal of Christian spiritual formation in order to clearly define the *what* and *why* of Christian spiritual theology.

Inner Transformation in Matthew 5:3-12

The Sermon begins with the Greek word: *makarios*. In most English translations of the Bible *makarios* is translated as “blessed” or “happy.” Of the two, “blessed” is the preferred translation as happiness tends to be understood as a circumstantially conditional emotion. Carson explains the difference: “Those who are blessed will generally be profoundly happy; but blessedness cannot be reduced to happiness.”¹⁹ Blessed is a more comprehensive reality than happiness. Carson further explains the nature of blessedness that Jesus speaks of:

To be ‘blessed’ means, fundamentally, to be approved, to find approval. When a man blessed God, he is approving God. Of course, he is not doing this in some condescending manner, but rather he is eulogizing God, praising God. When God blesses man, he is approving man; and that is always an act of condescension.²⁰

This kind of blessedness transcends circumstances and emotions.

In his commentary on Matthew, R. T. France describes a Welsh idiom that encapsulates the *makarios* of the disciple: *Gwyn eu byd*. In English, “White is their

¹⁹ Carson, *Jesus' Sermon*, 16.

²⁰ Carson, *Jesus' Sermon*, 16.

world.”²¹ *Gwyn eu byd* conveys an sense of totality or pervasiveness, such as the way newly fallen snow makes everything from the sky to the trees to the ground white. Every aspect of a disciple’s life is blessed and his entire perspective on life is viewed through the lens of blessedness.

Jesus describes the blessed life in Matthew 5:3-12 with eight descriptions traditionally referred to as the Beatitudes. “Beatitude” comes from the Latin *beatus*, which also means “blessed.” The Beatitudes describe a life so different from worldly values that it either compels non-believers toward righteousness (c.f. Matt 5:6) or repels them completely (c.f. Matt 5:10-12).

As with the rest of the Sermon, the Beatitudes are meant to be lived out. Lloyd-Jones points out four “general lessons” that Jesus intends his disciples to learn from the Beatitudes. First, “all Christians are to be like this.” Second, “all Christians are meant to manifest all of these characteristics.” Third, “none of these descriptions refers to what we may call a natural tendency.” Finally, the Beatitudes demonstrate “the essential, utter difference between the Christian and the non-Christian.”²² In short, they reflect one aspect of the goal of spiritual formation: conformity to the image of Christ experienced through inner transformation.

Lloyd-Jones comments on how lives that conform to the Beatitudes demonstrate the truth of the gospel in a powerful way:

The glory of the gospel is that when the Church is absolutely different from the world, she invariably attracts it. It is then that the world is made to listen to her message, though it may hate it at first. That is how revival comes. That must also be true of us as individuals. It should not be our

²¹ France, R. T.. *The Gospel of Matthew*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, edited by Stonehouse, Ned B., F. F. Bruce and Gordon D. Fee, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2007), 161.

²² Lloyd-Jones, *Studies*, 25, 26, 28.

ambition to be as much like everybody else as we can, though we happen to be Christian, but rather to be as different from everybody who is not a Christian as we can possibly be. Our ambition should be to be like Christ, the more like Him the better, and the more like Him we become, the more we shall be unlike everybody who is not a Christian.²³

The Beatitudes are a visible demonstration of inner conformity to the image of Christ.

For the sake of brevity, a commentary on the first Beatitude in Matthew 5:3 demonstrates how it is representative of all the Beatitudes. Highlighted is how the Beatitudes, like spiritual fruit (c.f. Gal 5:22-23), reflect the goal of inner transformation. Specifically noted is how the Beatitudes are evident in the life of Jesus Christ and how they are expressions of a life conformed to his image.

The first Beatitude Jesus gives his disciples is: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matt 5:3). The Christ-like image reflected in this Beatitude is spiritual poverty, or humility. Though Christ was never spiritually poor in the sense that he never sinned against Father, he nonetheless demonstrated humility in leaving the glory of heaven to be incarnated. The disciple conforms to the image of Christ as he bears the fruit of humility.

This is seen in Philippians 2:1-10 where Paul exhorts the Philippian church to live humbly with one another. The impetus for such humility is Christ’s humility: “Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men” (Phil 2:5-10). Here Paul indicates that Jesus is God, yet in his incarnated form, Jesus “made himself nothing” and took on “the form of a servant.” In other words, humble disciples reflect Christ’s image.

²³ Lloyd-Jones, *Studies*, 28.

To become spiritually poor, the disciple must have a face-to-face encounter with God. This encounter puts the disciple in his place, so to speak. John Calvin says in his introduction to *Institutes* that without seeing God, a person cannot possibly know himself: “It is certain that man never achieves a clear knowledge of himself unless he has first looked upon God’s face, and then descends from contemplating him to scrutinize himself.”²⁴ A true view of God in his righteousness and a true view of the disciple in his unrighteousness enable the disciple to recognize his spiritual poverty and need for God.

In his commentary on Matthew, J. C. Ryle speaks to the humility that is inspired by a sober view of self in relation to a high view of God. Ryle says:

The Lord Jesus calls “blessed” those who are poor in spirit (verse 3). He means the humble, and lowly-minded, and self-abased; he means those who are deeply convinced of their own sinfulness in God’s sight.... they regard themselves as “wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked” (Revelation 3:17). Blessed are all such! Humility is the very first letter in the alphabet of Christianity. We must begin low, if we want to build high.²⁵

Ryle emphasizes that spiritual poverty is a result of acknowledging need for God.

Lloyd-Jones emphasizes that humility is not a natural quality and is, therefore, a fruit of the Spirit. He says humility “is ultimately a man’s attitude toward himself.” It is not something “admired by the world; it is despised by it.” Indeed, humility is the “antithesis” of the world’s values. The world emphasizes “belief in self-reliance, self-confidence and self expression” and teaches people to “believe in yourself.”²⁶

²⁴ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. J. T. McNeill; trans. F. L. Battles (LCC 20; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 37.

²⁵ J. C. Ryle, *Matthew: Expository Thoughts on the Gospels*, The Crossway Classic Commentaries, ed. Alister McGrath and J. I. Packer (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1993), 24-25.

²⁶ Lloyd-Jones, *Studies*, 35.

On the other hand, according to Lloyd-Jones, humility is “a complete absence of pride, a complete absence of self-assurance and of self-reliance.” This is a spiritual quality because:

[Humility] is nothing, then, that we can produce; it is nothing that we can do in ourselves. It is just this tremendous awareness of our utter nothingness as we come face-to-face with God.... Any natural spirit that is in us goes out, because it is not only exposed in its smallness and weakness, but its sinfulness and foulness become apparent at the same time.

To become spiritually poor, one must “not look at yourself or begin by trying to do things to yourself.”²⁷ Spiritual poverty, like the rest of the Beatitudes, is a work of God.

Therefore, the Beatitudes are a facet of the Goal of spiritual formation: to be formed in the image of Christ.

Outer Transformation in Matthew 5:13-16

The Beatitudes describe the hidden, or inner, effects of grace in the disciple’s spiritual formation. Following the Beatitudes, Jesus describes his disciples as both the salt and light to the world. In so doing, Jesus teaches that Christian spiritual formation is not merely a personal exercise, but one that has transformative effects on the world.

As a church planer, the author primarily evaluated the effectiveness of Metanoia according to the evidence of outer transformation. This was partly due to the pressure of monthly reports submitted to financial sponsors that required quantitative measurements of baptisms, offering income, evangelistic efforts and ministry activities. Spending time reflecting on the inner transformation helped the author to expand his understanding of

²⁷ Lloyd-Jones, *Studies*, 40-41.

ministry effectiveness and success. Indeed, his reflection aided the author to understand that outer transformation truly flows from inner transformation brought by the Spirit.

When Jesus proclaims that his disciples are “the salt of the earth” and “the light of the world” (c.f. Matt 5:13-16), he imparts to them an important role and responsibility in the world. This is seen, first, in the image of salt and the role the disciple plays in being the salt of the earth: “You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people’s feet” (Matt 5:13).

Salt has two primary purposes, which metaphorically reflect the roles of disciples as “salt.” First, salt enhances the flavor of food. Thus, disciples enhance the quality of the world. As Lloyd-Jones comments on this verse: “life without Christianity is insipid.”²⁸ The inner working of “abundant life” within the disciple (c.f. John 10:9) billows outward and transforms the world.

Secondly, salt is a preservative. Just as salt preserves meat from rotting, disciples preserve the world from the decay of sin. Carson comments on this quality: “Implicitly [Jesus] is saying that apart from his disciples the world turns ever more rotten: Christians have the effect of delaying moral and spiritual putrefaction. If their lives conform to the norms of verses 3-12, they cannot help but be an influence for good in society.”²⁹ Carson explains that salt, like the Beatitudes, is a Holy Spirit formed quality that benefits both the believer and the world.

Jesus says salt that has lost its saltiness is worthless. There are two primary ways salt can become useless. First, salt becomes useless when diluted with another substance.

²⁸ Lloyd-Jones, *Studies*, 133.

²⁹ Carson, *Jesus’ Sermon*, 31.

The disciple becomes diluted as he allows sin, broken relationships, religion and the cares of this world to interfere with complete devotion to Jesus (c.f. Mark 4:1-20; 1 John 2:15-17). Lloyd-Jones says: "We are to be unlike the world.... Salt is essentially different from the medium in which it is placed and in a sense it exercises all its qualities by being different."³⁰ The disciple is still Jesus' salt, but he loses his effectiveness just as salt mixed with sand is worthless.

Second, disciples lose their saltiness when they are not actively preserving the world from decay or are leaving it insipid. Luther reminds the disciple: "Salt is not salt for itself, it cannot salt itself."³¹ Bonhoeffer speaks to this as well, saying: "For its own sake, as well as for the sake of the earth, the salt must remain salt, the disciple community must be faithful to the mission which the call of Christ has given it."³² It is God's gift to the world that the disciple is salt where he lives, works and plays.

The *imago Christi* is evident in the metaphor of salt. Christ actively prevented the spreading of sin through his atoning death and he continues to do so through his church. He enhances the quality of life by providing salvation. Jesus' disciples conform to his image as they faithfully live as salt. As John Stott says in his commentary on the Sermon:

Christian saltiness is Christian character as depicted in the Beatitudes, committed Christian discipleship exemplified in both deed and word. For effectiveness the Christian must retain his Christlikeness, as salt must retain its saltiness.... The influence of Christians in and on society depends on their being distinct, not identical.³³

Thus, salt is a reality that is simultaneously formed by God and cultivated by the disciple.

³⁰ Lloyd-Jones, *Studies*, 132.

³¹ Luther, *Sermons*, 54.

³² Bonhoeffer, *Cost of Discipleship*, 116.

³³ John R. W. Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7)*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1978), 60.

As salt, the disciple bears the fruit of preservation from both sin and insipidity in the world. Light gives the disciple the quality of illumination in a darkened world:

You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven. (Matt 5:14-16)

To light up the world is to share the message of life in the kingdom available through Christ, the Light of the world (c.f. John 8:12). To shine light is to proclaim this truth.

Jesus makes his disciple light to the world in two primary ways. First, Jesus' disciple is a light in his immediate sphere of influence, his "house" (Matt 5:15). "House" in Greek is *oikos*, which means the entirety of one's sphere of influence. The disciple is transformed by grace so that he can bring light to those still trapped in darkness (c.f. 1 Cor 7:17a, 20, 24). One way the disciple brings light is through the evangelistic effort of verbal proclamation of the gospel.

Verbal proclamation, an act of lighting up the *oikos*, is transformative activity. As Lloyd-Jones says, "light not only reveals the hidden things of darkness, it also explains the cause of the darkness."³⁴ Proclamation is a spiritually formative activity for the believer and his *oikos* because both the believer and his community are illuminated by the gospel. *Oikos* proclamation is the provision of foundational truths from which lives can be spiritually formed in Christ's image.

Commenting on the *oikos* influence, Luther says, "the most reliable index to a true Christian is this: if from the way he praises and preaches Christ the people learn that they are nothing and that Christ is everything."³⁵ Lloyd-Jones echoes Luther: "They will

³⁴ Lloyd-Jones, *Studies*, 145.

³⁵ Luther, *Sermons*, 66.

never have any light anywhere in this world except from you and from me and the gospel we believe and teach.... Are our lives a silent rebuke to them?"³⁶ Luther and Lloyd-Jones make it clear that every disciple is to bear the fruit of proclaiming the gospel in his *oikos*.

Secondly, Jesus says, "Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven" (Matt 5:16). The church and the disciple not only proclaim the gospel collectively and individually, but they also actively engage in the deeds of light so that God may be glorified. Carson explains that the deeds of light are "the norms of the kingdom, worked out in the lives of the heirs of the kingdom" and that they "constitute the witness of the kingdom."³⁷ The witness of the kingdom in word and deed brings praise to God (c.f. Matt 5:16).

As he did with salt, Jesus warns that a disciple can become ineffective in his function as the light of the world, pointing out how absurd it is to light a lamp and put it under a basket or to attempt to hide a city on a hill at night. Bonhoeffer says disciples that choose not to shine are not disciples at all: "Now [disciples] must be what they really are—otherwise they are not followers of Jesus."³⁸ Stott echoes Bonhoeffer's words, saying "we are not to conceal the truth we know or the truth of what we are."³⁹ Both Stott and Bonhoeffer infer that light is something produced by God and, therefore, the disciple would act contrary to his regenerated nature to hide it.

³⁶ Lloyd-Jones, *Studies*, 147.

³⁷ Carson, *Jesus' Sermon*, 33.

³⁸ Bonhoeffer, *Cost of Discipleship*, 117.

³⁹ Stott, *The Message of the Sermon*, 62.

Relational Transformation in Matthew 6:19-34 and 7:7-11

The author primarily focused on inner and outer evidence of transformation in his initial foray into crafting a spiritual theology. That a deepening love relationship between Father and disciple is an aspect of the goal of spiritual formation was hardly considered. However, as the author read more classic literature on spiritual formation, he discovered that such relational transformation tended to be a pervasive theme often referred to in context of prayer. This idea is further explored in Chapter 3, specifically in a case study focusing on Christian prayer.

The Sermon indicates that a deepening love relationship with Father is the disciple's motivation to live the Sermon and God's commands. In Matthew 6:19-24, Jesus explains that affection cannot be shared between God and possessions:

Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light, but if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!

No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.

If these verses are interpreted apart from an ever deepening love relationship with Father, all that remains is a command—love God, do not love possessions—and an act of piety—practice loving God more than loving possessions. Viewed in the context of a love relationship with Father, these verses envelop both command and action within a clear

motivation to carry them out *because* the disciple loves Father and *because* the disciple knows Father loves him. In other words, it is in order to protect and nurture this relationship that the disciple does these things.

While there is not space to adequately dialogue about Jesus' words on anxiety in Matthew 6:25-34, the text indicates that anxiety stems from a lack of confidence in Father's care and concern for the disciple. For instance, Jesus draws a distinction between those who do not know God and his disciples in verse 32 saying, "...the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all." This further reinforces the idea that relational transformation evidenced in a love relationship with Father is assumed in the Sermon.

This love relationship is evidenced in Matthew 7:7-11 where the fruit of relational transformation is confidence that Father loves the disciple, that he desires what is best for the disciple and that he answers the disciple's prayer:

Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!

In Luke, the "good things" of verse 11 is specified as the Holy Spirit (c.f. Luke 11:13).

Thus, as the disciple is relationally transformed, his requests are transformed such that he asks less for what God gives and begins asking more for God himself. This is not to say that no longer asking *from* God marks spiritual maturity, but rather that prayer takes on a deepening relational nuance as the disciple increasingly asks *for* God. In other words, he begins to ask *from* and *for* God as the love relationship deepens.

The author is at a loss for words to adequately explain how profound it is to experience the shift to increasingly ask *for* Father. In all humility, the author confesses that he all too often asks *from* Father more than he does *for* Father, but that he has experienced a noticeable shift over the past three years in the D.Min. journey. He now increasingly asks *for* Father more.

This shift began to occur when the author and his family began to keep Sabbath in response to his D.Min. studies on the subject. In keeping Sabbath, the author discovered the joy of “wasting time” with God as a means of deepening relationship with Father. Engaging in Sabbath activities previously considered by the author as “unproductive” because they yield no objective professional or academic results—such as walking in the woods, smoking his pipe, cuddling his children on the sofa—trained the author to notice God in the everyday moments of life. Paradoxically, “unproductive” Sabbath activities proved to generate spiritually transformative moments.

By keeping Sabbath, the author and his family intentionally opened themselves up to deepening relationship with Father. For at least one day each week, the author’s anxiety and stress levels dropped as he freely indulged in deepening intimacy with Father. This subjective experience demonstrated the truth in the Sermon that deepening relationship with Father takes care of anxiety and fear (c.f. Matt 6:25-34). This relational deepening had a spillover affect on the author’s prayers during the rest of the week such that he asked *for* Father more. Perhaps the author needed to personally experience this shift before he could recognize the theme of relational transformation in the Sermon.

This aspect of the Sermon is woefully unrepresented in the texts the author read on the Sermon. Instead of highlighting the Father’s love for the disciple, most authors

focused on the command and the act of piety. For instance, Carson makes the following comment on the motivation for not worrying in Matthew 6:25-34:

Because transient earthly treasures do not satisfy and do not last (6:19-21), *because* moral and spiritual vision is easily distorted and darkened (6:22f), *because* a choice must be made between God and Money (6:24), *because* the kingdom of God demands unswerving allegiance to its values (6:19-24), *therefore* do not worry, and in particular do not worry about mere things.⁴⁰

Carson explains that the disciple does not worry based upon certain theological truths that are found within the context preceding verses 25-34. While these truths are exegetically and Biblically sound, Carson neglects the motivation behind them: the disciple knows that Father loves him and thus desires to eliminate the distractions that divide his affection for Father.

Commenting on Matthew 7:7-11, Luther identifies three reasons why prayer is ineffective and God does answer prayer:

In the first place, there is our own flesh, that rotten old bag. It quickly becomes bored, inattentive, and indifferent to the Word of God and the good life.... Next comes the second enemy, the world. It begrudges us the dear Word and faith and refuses to put up with anything in us, no matter how weak we may be....

Those are two great temptations that hinder us inwardly in our prayer, and outwardly try to chase us away from it.... Now, the third enemy is the strongest of all, the devil himself. He has us at a great disadvantage for two reasons: by nature we are not good; and in addition we are weak in faith and in spirit.... This is why He adds the words “ask,” “seek,” and “knock,” to indicate that we do not have everything yet but that our situation is one of shortcomings and needs everywhere. If we had everything, we would not need to ask or seek; if we were already in heaven, we would not have to knock.⁴¹

Luther offers Biblical reasons for why Jesus would encourage his disciples to pray to Father by asking, seeking and knocking. And, like Carson, Luther neglects the most

⁴⁰ Carson, *Jesus' Sermon*, 87.

⁴¹ Luther, *Sermons*, 230-231.

powerful motivation: because the disciple knows Father loves him and deigns to answer his prayer, the disciple asks, seeks and knocks with confidence.

Having demonstrated how the locus of spiritual formation is reflected in the purpose of the Sermon—a manifesto for kingdom citizenship—and how the goal of spiritual formation is reflected in the Sermon, attention now turns to how the authority of spiritual formation—the written Word of God—is evident in the Sermon.

Authority: The Law, the Prophets and the Christ in Matthew 5:17-48

The Sermon is authoritative for spiritual formation primarily because of the One who spoke it. Throughout the Sermon, Jesus refers to himself as “Lord” and demands conformity to his teaching (c.f. Matt 7:21-23). In his declaration that he is the fulfillment of Scripture, Jesus implies he is equal to God in authority:

Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. (Matt 5:17-20)

It follows from this that Jesus’ Sermon is spiritually authoritative in two primary ways.

First, Jesus’ teaching is consistent with the broader witness of the Old Testament and he himself is its fulfillment (verses 5:17-18). On this, Carson notes:

...Jesus does not conceive of his life and ministry in terms of *opposition* to the Old Testament, but in terms of *bringing to fruition* that toward which it points. Thus, the Law and the Prophets, far from being abolished, find their valid continuity in terms of their outworking in Jesus. The detailed

prescriptions of the Old Testament may well be superseded, because whatever is prophetic must be in some sense provisional. But whatever is prophetic likewise discovers its legitimate continuity in the happy arrival of that toward which it has pointed.⁴²

Jesus affirms both the authority of the written Word and his authority to interpret it.

The second way the words of Jesus in the Sermon are spiritually authoritative is found in his affirmation that Scripture must be embraced as the governing authority for life, doctrine and mission. In Matthew 5:19-20, Jesus says that the kingdom is for those who obey Word of God and who also teach obedience to the Word. The kingdom is for the righteous who lives not according to the traditions of the scribes and Pharisees, but according to God's Law.

Such faith-full obedience demands the gospel. Bonhoeffer comments, "There is no fulfillment of the law apart from communion with God, and no communion with God apart from fulfillment of the law." The only way this communion is possible is by Christ "dying a sinner's death on a cross" for there "he embodies in his person the perfect fulfillment of the law." Bonhoeffer concludes, "Jesus Christ and he alone fulfills the law, because he alone lives in perfect communion with God."⁴³ The believer is imputed with Christ's righteous obedience upon salvation (c.f. 1 Cor 1:30).

Nonetheless, Jesus' fulfillment does not excuse the disciple from personally obeying the Word. Bonhoeffer says, "The fact that Jesus has fulfilled the law down to the very last letter does not release [disciples] from the same obedience." Rather, Jesus defines obedience and righteousness "not [as] a duty owed, but a perfect and truly personal communion with God." Bonhoeffer concludes saying, "Jesus not only possesses

⁴² Carson, *Jesus' Sermon*, 39-40.

⁴³ Bonhoeffer, *Cost of Discipleship*, 123.

this righteousness, but is himself the personal embodiment of it.”⁴⁴ In other words, Jesus imputes his righteousness to his disciple so that their relationship is not conditional upon the disciple’s obedience. This means the disciple’s obedience is the fruit of his relationship with Christ, or as Bonhoeffer says, his obedience is “a perfect and truly personal communion with God.”

The remainder of Matthew 5 demonstrates practical ways how the disciple submits to the spiritually authoritative Scripture: such as in victory over anger and lust (Matt 5:21-30), in fidelity of commitments (Matt 5:31-37) and in refusing retaliation against those who inflict injury (Matt 5:38-48). In these verses, Jesus interprets and affirms the Law and Prophets as authoritative for spiritual formation. For the purposes of this thesis-project, only one of these areas is explored as representative of the others: lust.

Commenting on the Pharisees and scribes’ errant interpretation of the seventh commandment (c.f. Exod 20:14), Jesus both affirms the commandment and the need to obey it:

You have heard that it was said, “You shall not commit adultery.” But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell. (Matt 5:27-30)

First, Jesus affirms the seventh commandment of the Decalogue. His correction of the errant interpretation is not a revising of God’s Law given to Moses. Rather, he corrects the traditional interpretation of the Law by his opponents. Stott points out that the Pharisees and scribes “gave a conveniently narrow definition of sexual sin and a

⁴⁴ Bonhoeffer, *Cost of Discipleship*, 124-125.

conveniently broad definition of sexual purity.”⁴⁵ That is to say, God intended the commandment to be more than merely not committing an adulterous act. Jesus explains that the law condemns adultery at its root: lust.

Secondly, in affirming the commandment, Jesus affirms the need to obey it. He deepens the demands of obedience to a heart level: the sinner commits “adultery with [another woman] in his heart.” Obedience is more than outward conformity to the Law because it necessitates prior inner transformation.

Stott explains the way inner transformation is required by this commandment: “Deeds of shame are preceded by fantasies of shame, and the inflaming of the imagination by the indiscipline of the eyes.... [W]henever men and women have learned sexual self-control in deed, it is because they have first learned it in the eyes of both flesh and fantasy.”⁴⁶ For Jesus, obedience is both an issue of deed—guarding the eyes and not committing the act of adultery—and heart—resisting the lustful desire.

Until recently, the author primarily approached pastoral care for Christian men struggling with addictions to pornography primarily through behavior modification. There is certainly nothing wrong in encouraging behavior modification. For instance, Jesus’ words on removing the hand and plucking out the eye that cause sin (c.f. Matt 5:29-30) are contextually similar to encouraging a man to cancel his internet service if he cannot stop downloading porn.

Yet, as the author has discovered in his own relationship with a spiritual director—a requirement for the D.Min. degree—helping a young man to identify root issues that cause sin is far more formative. Once the root issue is determined—in this

⁴⁵ Stott, *The Message of the Sermon*, 87.

⁴⁶ Stott, *The Message of the Sermon*, 88.

case, lust—Scriptural truths can be applied in a way that both ground the believer in his imputed righteousness from Christ and encourage him to apply effort to modify behavior to be consistent with his new identity. Thus, the authority of spiritual formation—the Word of God—guides transformational activity.

As demonstrated below, the practice of spiritual disciplines is a practical ways to mortify the flesh and obey the Law. Another way disciplines are beneficial to spiritual formation are as ways to facilitate the three aspects of the goal of spiritual formation. Thus, spiritual disciplines are the means of formation.

Means: Acts of Righteousness in Secret in Matthew 6:1-18

The author first encountered spiritual disciplines as a child around the time of his baptism. This initial encounter consisted of learning how to “have a quiet time” by studying Scripture and praying. As a young adult working on his Master of Divinity degree (M.Div.), the author was introduced to Richard Foster’s *A Celebration of Discipline*⁴⁷ and learned of several more classic, or traditional, disciplines. As seen in the next chapter, the author’s view of spiritual disciplines has matured throughout his D.Min. journey. What follows below are basic principles the author has discovered within the Sermon regarding the means of spiritual formation.

In Matthew 6:1-18, Jesus addresses three spiritual disciplines: almsgiving, prayer and fasting. In Matthew 6:1, Jesus says: “Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your

⁴⁷ Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* (New York: HarperCollins, 1998).

Father who is in heaven.” There are two principles in Matthew 6:1 that are reflected in each of the three disciplines: engaging the discipline “in secret” and receiving a reward from Father. These principles shed light on how a disciple practices disciplines as the means of formation.

The first principle is engaging disciplines “in secret.” This is seen in almsgiving: “But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret” (Matt 6:3-4a). Again in prayer: “But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret” (Matt 6:6a). And again in fasting: “But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret” (Matt 6:17-18a). “In secret” means that spiritual disciplines are endeavored out of love for God, not to gain the attention or approval of men. Indeed, each discipline is to be carried out in the presence of “your Father who sees in secret” (c.f. Matt 6:4, 6, 18).

“In secret” protects the disciple from engaging in the discipline out of self-love. Commenting on the verses where Jesus warns against conducting spiritual disciplines before men (Matt 6:2, 5, 16), Lloyd-Jones explains that “the ultimate choice is always the choice between pleasing self and pleasing God.” He continues his commentary, saying;

“Surely, then,” we may think, “the choice is between pleasing men and pleasing God.” I suggest that is not the choice: the ultimate choice is the choice between pleasing self and pleasing God, and that is where the subtlety of this matter comes in. Ultimately our only reason for pleasing men around us is that we may please ourselves. Our real desire is not to please others as such; we want to please them because we know that, if we do, they will think better of us. In other words, we are pleasing ourselves and are merely concerned about self-gratification.... What appears to be selfless may be just a very subtle form of selfishness.⁴⁸

Hence, Jesus cautions his disciples to give, pray and fast in secret with the Father.

⁴⁸ Lloyd-Jones, *Studies*, 293.

The disciple is also to desire Father's attention because Father is personal and relational. Jesus' scathing remarks of the pagans' prayer reveals how disciplines are not ends to themselves, but means of developing a love relationship with Father: "And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him" (Matt 6:7-8). The end of prayer for the pagan is to be heard, and this is possible, so he thinks, because he prays many words. On the other hand, Jesus indicates that Father already knows the request *before* it is asked. Therefore, the discipline of prayer is a means of cultivating relationship with Father, rather than getting information. This idea is developed further at the conclusion of Chapter 3.

The second principle of spiritual disciplines is receiving a reward from the Father. In concluding his remarks on each discipline, Jesus says: "And your Father who sees in secret *will reward you*" (Matt 6:4b, 6b, 18b, emphasis added). The reward the disciple seeks is nothing less than moving ever closer to the threefold goal of spiritual formation.

Lloyd-Jones points out that Jesus does not condemn the disciple for seeking the reward: "[Jesus] indicates that it is quite right to seek the reward which God gives." He clarifies that there is nothing wrong with seeking reward "as long as the desire is the reward of holiness, the reward of being with God."⁴⁹ Thus, God gives himself and his holiness to those who actively work out their salvation through appropriate means and ways of spiritual discipline.

That the means of spiritual formation reap the goal as a reward is evident in Matthew 6:14-15 where Jesus concludes his teaching on prayer saying: "For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do

⁴⁹ Lloyd-Jones, *Studies*, 295-296.

not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.” The forgiveness here cannot possibly be something that is earned by the disciple’s effort, for then this verse would be inconsistent with the doctrine of salvation by grace alone. The reward, then, is that the disciple becomes forgiving precisely because he is forgiven. It is God’s forgiveness of the disciple that motivates him to forgive others (c.f. Matt 18:15-35; 1 John 3:10, 4:7-8).

Luther comments on how God’s forgiveness precedes forgiving others:

...the outward forgiveness that I show in my deeds is a sure sign that I have the forgiveness of sin in the sight of God. On the other hand, if I do not show this in my relations with my neighbor, I have a sure sign that I do not have the forgiveness of sin in the sight of God but am still stuck in my unbelief. You see, this is the twofold forgiveness: one inward in the heart, clinging only to the Word of God; and one outward, breaking forth and assuring us that we have the inward one.

Luther further explains how works of faith—disciplines—relate to inner transformation:

“This is how we distinguish works as outward righteousness from faith as inward righteousness, but in such a way that the inward has precedence as the stem and root from which the good works must grow as fruit.”⁵⁰ For Luther, a discipline is an action motivated in the heart as an expression of faith.

There are, then, two rewards for the disciple engaging in spiritual disciplines: sanctification and deepening relationship with Father. When the former is the focus for a disciple endeavoring in a particular discipline, he at times confuses Father’s love and acceptance with Father’s work of sanctification. When this happens, a disciple often doubts Father’s unconditional acceptance of him if he does not experience the measure of sanctification he desires. For this reason, the author has learned to ask himself and those

⁵⁰ Luther, *Sermons*, 150.

he cares for pastorally what the motivation is for engaging in spiritual disciplines. This helps ensure that the disciplines are endeavored with appropriate motivation.

In sum, the Sermon presents two principles for spiritual disciplines: the disciple engages them in secret and receives the reward of conformity to the image of Christ. These two principles are broad enough to be applied as a guide to engaging in other spiritual disciplines.

Context: Guidelines for Kingdom Community in Matthew 6.14-15; 7:1-6, 12, 15-20

“Context” as an aspect of spiritual formation was missing in the author’s initial spiritual theology presented in his post-residency project for the first D.Min. residency. This is not to say that Christian community—the context of spiritual formation—was unimportant, but rather that the author considered it an assumed reality. However, not all Christian community is formative and that specific guidelines—or directing principles—are important to ensure that a community is formative.

The author experienced community as formative in Metanoia’s LTG program and, more recently, during the second D.Min. residency when the cohort kept an abbreviated version of the monastic daily office of prayer. Members of the cohort from various denominations prayerfully crafted prayer gatherings that facilitated camaraderie in the Spirit. Perhaps the greatest way the author recently experienced Christian community as the context of spiritual formation was in his relationship with a spiritual director. Through listening to the Spirit together with his director, the author discovered where and how the Spirit was at work in his life.

The formative nature of Christian community is peppered throughout the Sermon. It is experienced in forgiving one another (Matt 6:14-15) and asking for forgiveness (Matt 5:22-26), refusing to retaliate and loving enemies (Matt 5:38-48), keeping one another accountable (Matt 7:1-6), acting in the interest of others (Matt 7:12) and practicing discernment as to who is permitted to lead and teach the Christian community (Matt 7:15-20). The Sermon reinforces the idea that spiritual formation takes place in the company of other disciples and also in the presence of non-believers. For the purposes of this thesis-project, only one of these areas is discussed as a representation of the formative context of Christian community: acting in the interest of others.

In Matthew 7:12, Jesus links the act of loving people with fulfillment of God's commands: "So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets." This verse is often referred to as the "golden rule." The golden rule demonstrates how Christian community is formative in two primary ways.

The first is that one cannot obey the Law and the Prophets without community. Stott explains how the golden rule sums up the authority of the Law and the Prophets: "[W]hoever directs his conduct towards others according to how he would like others to direct theirs toward him has fulfilled the law and the prophets, at least in the matter of neighbor-love." He continues, explaining that the individual Christian is spiritually formed in community by obeying the Law and the Prophets through loving others:

...the Christian counter-culture is not just an individual value-system and life-style, but a community affair. It involves relationships. And the Christian community is in essence a family, God's family. Probably the two strongest elements in our Christian consciousness are an awareness of God as our Father and our fellow-Christians as our brothers and sisters through Christ, although at the same time we can never forget our

responsibility to those outside the family whom we long to see brought in.⁵¹

Thus, in Stott's view, obeying the Law and the Prophets takes place in both Christian community and in the evangelistic efforts of being salt and light to the world together.

The Christian cannot obey the golden rule naturally. Stott says "such love is beyond us apart from the grace of God." He points out that the golden rule is not necessarily unique to Jesus' teachings, but that the way Jesus presents it in the Sermon is much more far-reaching than other traditions. Stott's comments are quoted at length:

Much has been made by various commentators of the fact that the Golden Rule is found in similar—but always negative—form elsewhere. Confucius, for example, is credited with having said, "Do not to others what you would not wish done to yourself;" and the Stoics had an almost identical maxim. In the Old Testament Apocrypha we find: "Do not do to anyone what you yourself would hate," [Tobit 4:15, NEB] and this, it seems, is what the famous Rabbi Hillel quoted in c. 20 BC.... Rabbil Hillel said: "What is hateful to you, do not do to anyone else. This is the whole law; all the rest is only commentary."

Returning to the Golden Rule, there is really an enormous difference between the negative and rather grudging maxim of Hillel... and the positive initiative contained in the instruction of Jesus.... Even then it may sound a rather low standard, like "Love your neighbour as yourself." Actually, however, it is a high standard because self-love is a powerful force in our lives.... Also it is a remarkably flexible ethical principle.... Indeed, it is a principle of such wide application that Jesus could add, *for this is the law and the prophets*.⁵²

The golden rule is formative because it forces the believer to draw upon resources beyond himself to value others as he values himself. It is impossible to practice this, and so be spiritually formed, apart from community.

The second way Christian community is the context for spiritual formation is that community is itself spiritually formed as a corporate entity. Spiritual formation is not a

⁵¹ Stott, *The Message of the Sermon*, 191-192.

⁵² Stott, *The Message of the Sermon*, 190-191.

private affair, and it is not solely about the individual disciple. Christian community grows as a transformational force in the world as disciples practice the golden rule.

The author's D.Min. cohort experienced this reality as a community—despite the fact that most persons within the group saw each other for a combined total of six-weeks during three annual two-week residencies. For instance, the cohort supported one member whose spouse passed away, one member of the cohort anonymously paid tuition for another member whose house was flooded and many cohort members shared prayer concerns on the group's social media website. Thus, even a task-oriented or temporal Christian community—such as a D.Min. cohort or a mission team in a local church setting—can experience spiritual formation communally.

This is especially true when a church community is spiritually formed in the image of Christ, for then it becomes a transformational force in the world. Lloyd-Jones points out the conundrum the world experiences in valuing the virtue of the golden rule, but failing to live it:

...the golden rule has been confronting mankind for nearly two thousand years, and for the last hundred years in particular we have done everything we can by legislation and education to improve men, but still they are not obeying it.

Why is this so? It is just at this point that theology comes in. The first statement of the gospel is that man is sinful and perverted. He is a creature that is so bound and governed by evil that he cannot keep the golden rule.... So it is useless to hold the law before such people. They hate the law, they do not want it. Of course, when they sit back in their armchair and listen to an abstract statement about life as it should be, they say that they like it. But if you apply the law to them, they immediately hate it and react against it. The moment it is applied to them they dislike and resent it.⁵³

⁵³ Lloyd-Jones, *Studies*, 471.

In other words, the *status quo* of fallen humanity is to know the law of God through general revelation and to experience the frustration of not being able to live it as reality due to sin (c.f. Rom 1:18-32; 8:7). This is not the case with Christian community where the power and resources of the Spirit are available to obey Christ's commands.

The community of faith demonstrates to the world that people can live out the golden rule by the grace of God. Lloyd-Jones explains how a community living out the golden rule is a spiritually formative force in the world:

You see everybody in a spiritual way. It is only when we come to this, after having started with God and sin and self and other, that we shall indeed be able to implement this amazing summary of the law and the prophets.... That is the thing to which we are called in Christ Jesus. We are to implement it, we are to practise [sic] it. And as we do so we shall be showing the world the only way in which its problem can be solved. We shall at the same time be missionaries and ambassadors for Christ.⁵⁴

That Jesus gives the golden rule in the Sermon indicates he expects his community to be corporately conformed to his image so that they will be a city on a hill in a dark world.

Summary

In sum, Jesus gives a manifesto of discipleship to himself and life in the kingdom of heaven in the Sermon. The Sermon is a spiritually formative text that can be interpreted within the author's spiritual formation framework to highlight its formative nature. Additionally, the Sermon can be applied to produce a comprehensive spiritual formation curriculum for Metanoia as will be demonstrated in Chapter 5.

"Spiritual theology" as presented in this chapter is thus summarized as the study of how a believer in Jesus Christ lives the gospel of Jesus Christ day-by-day (locus) to be

⁵⁴ Lloyd-Jones, *Studies*, 474-475.

conformed to the image of Christ for the sake of the world (goal) as guided by the written and living Word of Christ (authority) by means of practicing spiritual disciplines (means) within the context of spiritually formative community (context). The following chapter brings additional Scripture and Christian authors into dialogue over this theological framework, further demonstrating the uniqueness of Christian spiritual formation and highlighting broader implications for applying the Sermon and the framework for corporate spiritual formation curriculum.

CHAPTER 3

LITERATURE DIALOGUE: A THEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

FOR CHRISTIAN SPIRITUAL FORMATION

Your eyes are windows into your body. If you open your eyes wide in wonder and belief, your body fills up with light. If you live squinty-eyed in greed and distrust, your body is a dank cellar. If you pull the blinds on your windows, what a dark life you will have!

— Jesus Christ, Matthew 6:22-23 (The Message)

It should not be our ambition to be as much like everybody else as we can, though we happen to be Christian, but rather to be as different from everybody who is not a Christian as we can possibly be. Our ambition should be to be like Christ, the more like Him the better, and the more like Him we become, the more we shall be unlike everybody who is not a Christian.

— D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*

Defining Terms

This chapter brings together several authors in dialogue with one another over Christian spiritual formation. First, three terms are defined: “spiritual,” “spiritual formation” and “discipleship.” Second, the authors are brought into dialogue over the theological framework for spiritual formation presented in Chapter 2. The chapter concludes with a case study on prayer that demonstrates the uniqueness of Christian spiritual formation in the midst of emerging Western interest in spirituality.

Defining “Spirituality”

In contemporary Western culture “spirituality” might describe anything from practicing Buddhist meditation to a thoughtful walk in the woods. In Christian circles “spiritual” might refer to an emotionally moving worship gathering or the monastic practice of contemplative prayer. As demonstrated in Chapter 1, Metanoia is strategically located in the midst of a very “spiritual” environment in the Ellicott City area. It is the author’s experience that “spirituality” can mean different things to different people.

For example, while studying at a coffee shop in Historic Ellicott City the author recently engaged a café regular in discussion over his particular spiritual journey. The gentleman explained that he enjoys reading the works of metaphysicians such as Eckhart Tolle and Joel Goldsmith. As the author had opportunity to describe his own spiritual journey, the man interjected that he, too, had “the Christ-consciousness” within him. Although the author spoke about Christ as the Person and Lord found in Christian Scripture, the man reinterpreted the author’s words with his particular understanding that Christ is not a Person, but a mystical force or “consciousness.” This highlights the reason why it is necessary to define words like “spirituality” in order to clearly define what is meant in Metanoia’s purpose statement: “Metanoia Church is a *spiritual* community moving toward Jesus Christ” (emphasis added).

From the earliest Hebrew Scriptures, it is clear that humans are physical-spiritual beings. In Genesis 2:7, Creator God breathed his life-giving spirit (*ruach*) into Adam, thus creating him as both a physical and spiritual being. This spirit-breath is not God, as though humans were an extension of God’s divinity, but rather an aspect of being formed *imago Dei* (c.f. Gen 1:26-27).

Deuteronomy 6:5 infers there is no dichotomy between the physical and spiritual aspects of humanity: “You shall love the Lord your God with *all your heart* and with *all your soul* and with *all your might*” (emphasis added). The English translation suggests that these are three distinct aspects of humans, as though the heart, soul and might could be compartmentalized. However, the essence of the text is that all human activity is physical because people have bodies and at the same time spiritual because people have an unseen heart and soul.

Romans 5:12-21 indicates that through humanity’s first father, Adam, people are born spiritually “dead,” meaning that all persons inherit a sin nature so that even the most moral, righteousness of righteousness are sinful (c.f. Isa 64:4-7; Rom 3:9-20). On the other hand, Jesus of Nazareth was the paragon of true humanity because he lived righteously—physically and spiritually—before God. Jesus Christ—Son of God, Son of Man—is the perfect human being.

In *Christian Spirituality*, Alister McGrath explains that the Hebrew *ruach*—translated as spirit, breath or wind—is “what gives life and animation to someone.” For the Christian, “spirituality” refers to the life of faith in Christ, “what drives and motivates it, and what people find helpful in sustaining and developing it.” Christian spirituality is unique in that it “is reflection on the whole Christian enterprise of achieving and sustaining a relationship with God, which includes both public worship and private devotion, and the results of these in actual Christian life.”¹ As McGrath explains, Christian spirituality is human activity that deepens the believer’s relationship to Christ and his faith in Christ.

¹ Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Spirituality: An Introduction* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 1999), 1-2.

For the purposes of this thesis-project, “spirituality” is a descriptive term referring to the invisible aspect of human activity that encompasses heart, mind, soul and body. For the believer in Christ, spirituality is the sum total of life lived “in the Spirit” (c.f. Rom 8:9-11) which, according to McGrath, nurtures the “achieving and sustaining [of] a relationship with God.” For the non-believer, spirituality is the sum total of life lived “in the flesh” which includes both conscious and unconscious idolatry (c.f. Rom 1:18-31, 8:1-8). Thus, all of human activity is both physical and spiritual, visible and invisible.

Defining “Spiritual Formation”

Since all humans are spiritual, it follows that “spiritual formation” is a process that happens to everyone regardless of creed or conviction. Dallas Willard provides the following definition of spiritual formation in *Renovation of the Heart*: “without regard to any specifically religious context or tradition, [spiritual formation] is the process by which human spirit or will is given a definite ‘form’ or character.”² In other words, because spirituality is an innate aspect of all persons, everyone is spiritually formed. Willard’s definition is the understood meaning of “spiritual formation” as the term is used in this thesis-project.

Because spiritual formation is common to everyone, Willard distinguishes Christian spiritual formation from spiritual formation in general by calling it “spiritual transformation.” Spiritual transformation refers to how “the whole person [is transformed] into the goodness and power seen in Jesus and his ‘Abba’ Father.” It is

² Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart: Putting On the Character of Christ* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2002), 19.

unique in that it “refers to the Spirit-driven process of forming the inner world of the human self in such a way that it becomes like the inner being of Christ himself.”³ In other words, Christian spiritual formation is impossible without the activity of the Spirit in the life of the believer.

Eugene Peterson also finds it helpful to distinguish Christian spiritual formation from spiritual formation in general, so he chooses the phrase: “the Christian life.” In *Christ Plays In Ten Thousand Places*, Peterson states that the “Christian life is not about us: it is about God.” Believers are neither the subject nor the driving force of the Christian life—God is. Confusing this is what Peterson calls the “great weakness of North American spirituality.” Co-opting the self-help systems of our culture, spirituality becomes all about us “fulfilling our potential, getting in on the blessings of God, expanding our influence, finding our gifts, getting a handle on principles by which we can get an edge over the competition. And the more there is of us, the less there is of God.”⁴ Based on the demographic research of the Ellicott City area, it is assumed that Peterson’s description describes the vast majority of the population.

Defining “Discipleship”

“Discipleship” and spiritual formation are related, but not synonymous terms. Discipleship, as defined in this thesis-project, is that process by which a believer in Jesus Christ is taught and subsequently teaches others to observe everything that Jesus commanded his disciples (c.f. Matt 28:18-20). Spiritual formation, as defined above, is

³ Willard, *Renovation*, 22-23.

⁴ Eugene H. Peterson, *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places: A Conversation in Spiritual Theology* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2005), 335.

the broader context of discipleship. In becoming a disciple, the believer is spiritually made “alive to Christ” (c.f. Rom 6:11; Eph 2:5; 1 Pet 3:18) so that he can be actively conformed to the image of Christ (c.f. Eph 3:16-19). Thus, discipleship is that aspect of Christian spiritual formation that describes the disciple’s growth in knowledge and observance of Christ’s commands.

Unfortunately, in contemporary Christian literature, discipleship and spiritual formation are often disconnected. This was the author’s experience growing up in Christian churches where discipleship was often defined in terms of classes—such as “Discipleship Training”—and deeds—such as “having a quiet time” and sharing one’s faith. While working on his M.Div. degree, the author took a required course in “spiritual formation” and was introduced to the broader context of discipleship and, more importantly, soul care. Unfortunately, most of what the author learned about spiritual formation was not taught in the churches he had been part of.

R. Thomas Ashbrook laments this dichotomy between discipleship and spiritual formation in *Mansions of the Heart*:

...*spiritual formation* spans the whole of the Christian life, while the term *discipleship* has been used to relate primarily to the early spiritual growth years. But the problem is that although the old discipleship term had a concrete meaning..., spiritual formation became a general and elusive term. Discipleship was aimed at equipping the believer for ministry. Character development worked at Christian integrity and behavior. Ongoing spiritual formation targets much more: lifelong transformation of the whole person into the image of Christ, in the context of a deep relationship with God.⁵

It is to this “ongoing... lifelong transformation of the whole person” that attention now turns by way of a literature dialogue over the theological framework from Chapter 2.

⁵ R. Thomas Ashbrook, *Mansions of the Heart: Exploring the Seven Stages of Spiritual Growth* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2009), 11.

Dialogue: A Theological Framework for Christian Spiritual Formation

Christian spiritual formation and theology are inseparable. McGrath explains the relationship between the two: theology “is about theory, and [spirituality] the practice, of the Christian life.” Theology “can be thought of simply as the systematic analysis of the basic teachings of the Christian faith.” Its role alongside of spirituality is to “establish a framework within which spirituality is to be set.”⁶ Thus, it is impossible to have a robust theology without spiritual formation and vice versa.

This is because theology apart from spiritual formation is in danger of being reduced to an exercise of academia. Peterson argues that rather than being a strictly academic exercise, spiritual theology—the melding of spiritual formation and systematic theology—“represents the conviction that all theology, no exceptions, has to do with the living God who creates us as living creatures to live to his glory.” He further asserts that the lived-out formative nature of spiritual theology prevents the consumption of knowledge for knowledge’s sake. For Peterson: “[Spiritual theology] is a cultivated disposition to live theology, to live everything that God reveals to us in Scripture and Jesus and then live it in the neighborhood, in our neighborhood. Most of us know far more about God than we actually live in obedient faith in God.”⁷ Spiritual theology, then, is an active discipline of both study and practice. This melding of theology and practice to form spiritual theology is demonstrated below in dialogue over the author’s theological framework for spiritual formation.

⁶ McGrath, *Christian Spirituality*, 25, 28.

⁷ Peterson, *Christ Plays*, 6, 339.

Locus: The Gospel

In the Sermon, the locus, or centre, of spiritual formation is the gospel of the kingdom of heaven. Francis Schaeffer explains in *True Spirituality* that Christian spirituality consists of actively conforming one's entire being to the reality of the "rejected, slain, raised" paradigm found in the gospel. The three-fold paradigm is informed by Christ's life, death and resurrection as relived in the believer's experience of the three-fold nature of salvation: justification (rejected), sanctification (slain) and glorification (raised). As Schaeffer points out, faith is central to Christian spirituality: "To believe him, not just when I accept Christ as Savior, but also at every moment, one moment at a time: this is the Christian life, and this is true spirituality."⁸ Thus, according to Schaeffer, the locus of Christian spirituality—that which uniquely distinguishes it from other spiritualities—is living the gospel.

Peterson explains that "'Trinity' is the theological formulation that most adequately provides a structure for keeping conversations on the Christian life coherent, focused, and personal." Trinity "is our most exuberant intellectual venture in thinking about God."⁹ Apart from living the gospel and the active work of the Trinity in the believer's life, achieving the goal of Christian spiritual formation is a futile endeavor.

Living the gospel is a way of life informed by and experienced through the Trinity. Simon Chan states in *Spiritual Theology* that the doctrine of the Trinity is not so much "about the threeness of God *per se* but about the mystery of the God who is both one and yet three, both a God-in-himself and a God-for-us in his trinitarian existence."

⁸ Francis A. Schaeffer, *True Spirituality* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2001), 22, 80.

⁹ Peterson, *Christ Plays*, 6-7.

The Trinitarian existence of God melds his transcendence and immanence, thus giving meaning and unity to all reality. Chan says Christian, or “Trinitarian,” spirituality is characterized “first, [by] form and stability and a sacramental understanding of created things. Second, it seeks a personal relationship with God through the person of Jesus Christ. Third, it is open to the powerful workings of God the Spirit in signs and wonders as well as in “holy familiarity.”¹⁰ Trinitarian theology is formative because it demands life transformation be lived out.

The Sermon sets the bar of Christian spirituality high: conforming to and living in light of the kingdom. As seen above, this is an impossible endeavor apart from the active work of the Trinity in the believer’s life in the “rejected, slain, raised” paradigm. Having explored this aspect of spiritual formation over the past three-plus years through D.Min. research, the author has grown in his ability to carry out pastoral duties such as preaching and counseling through bringing the gospel to bear on the situation such that the spiritual transformation of individuals and the church body is facilitated. Indeed, that the gospel is the locus of spiritual formation necessitates that the author and other pastors view their role as guides and not saviors in the greater context of kingdom life.

Goal: Formed In the Image of Christ

The goal of spiritual formation is threefold: inner, outer and relational transformation. The threefold goal corresponds with other terminology and doctrines in Christian theology and literature. For the purposes of this dialogue, inner transformation

¹⁰ Simon Chan, *Spiritual Theology: A Systematic Study of the Christian Life* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 45, 49.

corresponds to uncovering and mortifying the “false self.” Outer transformation corresponds to the doctrine of “progressive sanctification.” Relational transformation corresponds to what tends to be referred to in Evangelical circles as “personal relationship to/with Christ.” As demonstrated in Chapter 2, regardless of terminology, the threefold goal of spiritual formation is summed up as conforming to the image of Christ.

The first of the threefold goal is inner transformation, or identifying and mortifying the “old man” or “false self” (c.f. Rom 6:6; Eph 4:22; Col 3:9). In *The Deeper Journey*, M. Robert Mulholland, Jr. draws on Jeremiah 17:5-10 to define the true and false selves. Jeremiah “reveals there are two fundamental ways of being human in the world: trusting in our human resources and abilities or a radical trust in God.... You might describe these two ways of being in the world as the ‘false self’ and the ‘true self.’” Mulholland continues, “Unless you are aware of these two selves, these two ways of being in the world, you will have great difficulty allowing God to lead you into a deeper life of wholeness in Christ.”¹¹ As Paul says in Colossians 3, this is “to put off the flesh” and “to put on Christ.”

According to Mulholland, the false self, “a self rooted in things other than God for its identity,” is characterized by perspectives, attitudes and decisions that are “fearful, protective, possessive, manipulative, destructive, self-promoting, indulgent, [and] distinction-making.”¹² In *The Way of the Heart*, Henri Nouwen adds an additional characteristic of the false self: compulsive. Nouwen says the false self “points to the need for ongoing and increasing affirmation.” Such compulsions produce “the two main

¹¹ M. Robert Mulholland, Jr., *The Deeper Journey: The Spirituality of Discovering Your True Self* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 23-24.

¹² Mulholland, *Deeper Journey*, 44.

enemies of the spiritual life: anger and greed.”¹³ Both Mulholland and Nouwen’s descriptions of the false self describe inner realities that do not reflect the presence and work of the Holy Spirit (c.f. Gal 5:17-21).

On the other hand, the true self consists of the image of Christ formed within the believer. In Galatians 5:22-24, Paul describes the true self in terms of what the *imago Christi* produces: spiritual fruit. Putting off the false self is complimented with the putting on of the true self, or as Paul says, putting on Christ (c.f. Gal 3:27; Col 2:11, 3:1-17). Inner transformation in the Sermon is associated with the Beatitudes and corresponds with Paul’s language of spiritual fruit and putting on Christ (c.f. Col 3:1-17) and with Mulholland and Nouwen’s language of true self.

The fruit of the spirit and the false self are not always easily identifiable. Two reflective spiritual disciplines have helped the author in identifying both spiritual fruit and the false self in his own life. The first is journaling, by which the author is able to reflect on his life over the course of a period of time. The second is having a spiritual director, a discerning individual the author invites to listen to both the author and the Holy Spirit. The combination of these two disciplines has helped the author focus on more than “sin management” to measure spiritual growth. As a result, the author is increasingly able to identify and celebrate the transformational work of the Spirit in his life. By seeing the work of the Spirit in his life, the author now experiences a deeper assurance of salvation and the acceptance of the Father than he ever had before.

The images of salt and light in the Sermon show how inner transformation overflows to outer transformation. This inner and outer transformation is unachievable in

¹³ Henri J. M. Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart: Connecting with God Through Prayer, Wisdom, and Silence* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1981), 13.

this lifetime, but it can be experienced in ever increasing degrees. Growing in outer conformity to the image of Christ in increasing degrees is commonly referred to as the doctrine of progressive sanctification.

Wayne Grudem defines “sanctification” in his *Systematic Theology* as “a progressive work of God and man that makes us more and more free from sin and like Christ in our actual lives.”¹⁴ Two aspects of outer transformation are highlighted in this definition of progressive sanctification (sanctification): freedom from sin and living in a way that conforms to Christ. Thus, conformity to the image of Christ in deed is synonymous with the doctrine of sanctification. These Christlike deeds bring glory to Father (c.f. Matt 5:16).

Willard describes the relationship between inner and outer transformation in terms of progressive growth in obedience to God: “Single-minded and joyous devotion to God and his will, to what God wants for us—and to service to him and to others because of him—is what the will transformed into Christlikeness looks like.” The transformed will results in a changed character, which overflows in changed behavior. This is cultivated along the progression from surrender, to abandonment, to contentment and finally to “energetic participation in accomplishing God’s will in our world.”¹⁵ This reflects the progression found in the image of light in the Sermon: becoming light by the grace of God results in bearing light in the world through word and deed, which results in glorifying Father.

Sanctification, then, is not just for the believer’s benefit, but for the sake of the world as well. There is an missional aspect to spiritual formation whereby the believer’s

¹⁴ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 746.

¹⁵ Willard, *Renovation*, 143, 150-151.

sanctification is a visible witness to the gospel. Peter relates sanctification to missional witness in his first epistle:

...but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. (1 Pet 3:15-16)

Peter states that a transformational relationship with Christ is evident to the world, that some may desire it and that God works through the believer to proclaim the good news.

The remaining facet of the threefold goal of spiritual formation is increasing love of God. Ashbrook explains that “God’s goal for us is simply a restored relationship of love with God through Jesus Christ. It is so deceptively simple that it’s often overlooked.”¹⁶ Ashbrook clearly places love of God as the premiere goal of Christian spiritual formation.

John, like Ashbrook, places love of God as the driving force behind spiritual formation in 1 John 5:3: “For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome.” For John, keeping the commands of God is the overflow of loving God. Obeying God is not a burdensome task for the believer—it is a joyful act of loving the One who has accepted him. Love of God as the driving force in spiritual formation is further reflected in the Sermon. Thus, love of God—relational transformation—serves as both a motivating factor and goal of spiritual formation.

The goal of spiritual formation is conforming to the image of Christ, facets of which include putting off the false self, progressive sanctification and ever increasing love of God. The three-fold goal of spiritual formation is mutually reinforcing. For instance, as the believer falls deeper in love with God he desires to please God more by

¹⁶ Ashbrook, *Mansions*, 12.

obeying him. As his outer life and his love relationship with Christ grow, his inner life is strengthened. A transformed inner life overflows in greater obedience, which is an expression of one's love for God. All of this witnesses to the gospel in the world with the result that Father is glorified.

Authority: The Written Word of God

The authority of spiritual formation is the written Word of God because it is given by and points to the living Word of God, Jesus Christ. When Paul writes to Timothy, he tells him that Scripture is sufficient to “make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim 3:15b) implying that the Old Testament proclaims Christ. He also highlights the formative nature of Scripture: “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work” (2 Tim 3:16-17). Thus, Scripture is authoritative for spiritual formation.

Grudem explains why Scripture is authoritative: “The authority of Scripture means that all the words in Scripture are God’s words in such a way that to disbelieve or disobey any word of Scripture is to disbelieve or disobey God.” Grudem further argues that as God’s Word, Scripture is the ultimate standard of truth:

In John 17 Jesus prays to the Father, “Sanctify them in the truth; *your word is truth*” (John 17:17). This verse is interesting because Jesus does not use the adjectives *alethin*os or *alethes* (“true”), which we might have expected, to say, “Your word is true.” Rather, he uses a noun, *aletheia* (“truth”), to say that God’s Word is not simply “true,” but it is truth itself.

The difference is significant, for this statement encourages us to think of the Bible not simply as being “true” in the sense that it conforms to some

higher standard of truth, but rather to think of the Bible as being itself the final standard of truth. The Bible is God's Word, and God's Word is the ultimate definition of what is true and what is not true: God's Word is itself *truth*. Thus we are to think of the Bible as the ultimate standard of truth, the reference point by which every other claim to truthfulness is to be measured. Those assertions that conform with Scripture are "true" while those that do not conform with Scripture are not true.

What then is truth? Truth is what God says, and we have what God says (accurately but not exhaustively) in the Bible.¹⁷

Spiritual formation is understood and endeavored within the parameters of God's Word.

Peterson highlights the importance of the Word in spiritual formation in *Traveling Light* where he states that "[n]othing counts more in the way we live than what we believe about God." For, "[a] failure to get it right in our minds becomes a failure to get it right in our lives."¹⁸ Scripture informs the mind with truth so that the heart and body can respond rightly. When there is another guiding authority, the believer can be confused or frustrated in their spiritual journey.

To some extent, the author experienced this growing up in an SBC church in Alabama in what was taught about the relationship of alcohol consumption to sanctification. The author was taught that believers be teetotalers in order to faithfully live the Christian faith. While there are commands in Scripture prohibiting the abuse of alcohol, such a teetotal command for all believers does not exist in Scripture. As a result, the author's understanding of sanctification included an extra-Biblical command that lacked the authority of the written Word. As Peterson notes above, a failure to understand what the Bible says—in this case, regarding alcohol consumption—resulted in an errant understanding of both God and the practice of spiritual formation.

¹⁷ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 73, 83.

¹⁸ Eugene H. Peterson, *Traveling Light: Modern Mediations on St. Paul's Letter of Freedom* (Colorado Springs: Helmers & Howard, 1988), 35.

In *Eat This Book*, Peterson states that the Bible is the “primary text” upon which Christian spirituality is “rooted in and shaped.” Spiritual formation is not so much concerned with moral codes or systematic study of doctrine, but rather with submitting “our lives to what we read in Scripture.” In so doing, “we find that we are not being led to see God in our stories but our stories in God’s.”¹⁹ This “spirit” behind the “letter” of the Law is reflected in Christ’s teachings on matters of the Law in Matthew 5:17-48.

Means: Spiritual Disciplines

Having discussed the uniqueness of Christian spirituality in terms of its locus, goals and authority, it is necessary to explain the mechanics, or means, of spiritual formation. As explained in Chapter 2, the means of spiritual formation are spiritual disciplines—such as the disciplines of prayer, fasting and almsgiving in Matthew 6:1-18. As is demonstrated below, disciplines are not formative in and of themselves, but only in light of the gospel of the free grace of God.

The believer is responsible to partner with the Holy Spirit to experience the goal of spiritual formation. Peter explains the work of the Spirit and the believer in tandem:

His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire. For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep

¹⁹ Eugene H. Peterson, *Eat This Book: A Conversation In the Art of Spiritual Reading* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2006), 15, 43-44.

you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins. Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to make your calling and election sure, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall. For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. (2 Pet 1:3-11, emphasis added)

The believer must put forth a measure of effort in order to live the Christian life. Spiritual disciplines are the means by which the believer puts forth such effort.

In *Life With God*, Richard Foster defines a spiritual discipline as “an intentionally directed action by which we do what we can do in order to receive from God the ability (or power) to do what we cannot do by direct effort.” A discipline is “only a means to deeper life, not the life itself.” We are to exercise our will, specifically in regards to power over our bodies, in order to “practice cooperation with God.”²⁰ Echoing Foster’s understanding of spiritual disciplines, Willard defines them as “activities that are in our power and that enable us to do what we cannot do by direct effort.”²¹ Disciplines, then, are intentional activities engaged in by the believer in order to cooperate with God’s grace to be formed in the image of Christ.

In Romans 12:1-2, Paul explains that worship is central to spiritual formation:

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

According to this passage, worship is the intentional act of presenting the body to God as a living sacrifice and conforming the mind to God’s ways and his will.

²⁰ Richard J. Foster and Kathryn A. Helmers, *Life With God: Reading the Bible for Spiritual Transformation* (New York: HarperCollins, 2008), 16, 136, 137.

²¹ Willard, *Renovation*, 113.

In her *Handbook*, Adele Calhoun further highlights the relationship between worship and discipline: “I believe the root of all desire stems from our innate need to open our lives to God in worship.” She describes this desire as “our ache for change, our longing for belonging, our desperation to make a difference.” This ache is brought before Jesus through spiritual disciplines—the primary means of “keeping company” with the Trinity. Calhoun explains: “Worship is every discipline’s end game! We miss the point and endanger our souls when we think of spiritual disciplines as ends in themselves.”²² An attitude of worship reminds the believer that he is dependent upon the grace of God, and subsequently frees him to engage in virtually any activity as a means of spiritual discipline when carried out with intentionality.

Thus, any and every physical or mental activity that the believer engages in is understood as a spiritual discipline when it is intentionally endeavored as an act of worship and for the purposes of conforming to the image of Christ. The author did not always hold this view. He previously limited himself to an understanding of disciplines as a sort of codified list—such as the twelve classic disciplines described in Richard Foster’s *Celebration of Discipline*.²³ So strict was the author in what constituted a discipline that when he read Calhoun’s *Handbook* during the first D.Min. residency, he pushed back against her listing of sixty-three disciplines.

The author came to his current understanding of spiritual disciplines as he experienced them as such while in a spiritual direction relationship during his D.Min.

²² Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices That Transform Us* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 19-20.

²³ Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* (New York: HarperCollins, 1998). Foster divides his book into three categories: the inward disciplines (meditation, prayer, fasting, study), the outward disciplines (simplicity, solitude, submission, service) and the corporate disciplines (confession, worship, guidance, celebration).

studies. The author's director guided him into discovering that while there are indeed traditional or classic disciplines recognized by Christians around the world, any activity is an opportunity to cooperate with the Spirit to bring about the image of Christ. The author experienced this reality to be true in his own life as he engaged in a myriad of unique spiritual disciplines and allowed himself to stretch his previously constricted understanding of spiritual discipline. For instance, the author recently enjoyed walking in the woods, smoking his pipe, playing with his children, romancing his wife, fasting from social media and sitting in silence as means of spiritual formation.

That said, not every act of worship is spiritual discipline. The activity must be engaged with intentionality—specifically, the intent to conform to the image of Christ. Dietrich Bonhoeffer describes the role of intentionality in *The Cost of Discipleship*. Grace empowered obedience is the sustaining factor of spiritual formation through intentional spiritual discipline: “discipleship never consists in this or that specific action: it is always a decision, either for or against Jesus Christ.”²⁴ Spiritual formation occurs through the believer's intentional act of spiritual worship—discipline—in cooperation with the free grace of God through the Spirit.

The work of grace in spiritual discipline enables the disciple to cultivate virtue and kill vice, or as Paul says in Romans 8:1-11 and Galatians 5:16-26 to cultivate spiritual fruit and kill the works of the flesh. Chan explains the way grace and discipline work together in moving away from vice and toward virtue: “When growth in the Christian life is seen as the cultivation of virtues, proper instruction in techniques of cultivation is essential... [This] presupposes a doctrine of grace as divine favor... [and] a doctrine of grace as endowment, an enabling gift.” Chan defines the vices as the “seven

²⁴ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995), 226.

deadly sins” as codified by Gregory the Great (540-604): vainglory, envy, anger, melancholy, greed, gluttony and lust. He identifies the virtues as faith, hope and love.²⁵ Movement away from vice and toward Biblical virtue, fruit of the Spirit and Beatitudes is possible by God’s grace and the activity of the believer through spiritual discipline.

Context: Partnership with the Trinity in Christian Community

Spiritual formation does not take place in a vacuum. Thus, disciples need one another in order to conform to the *imago Christi* (c.f. Eph 4:1-16). This is evident in the Sermon and elsewhere in Scripture, in particular, the Great Commandment:

And one of them, a lawyer, asked [Jesus] a question to test him. “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.” (Matt 22:35-40)

In 22:40, Jesus equates the commandments to love God and love neighbor as of equal importance. The believer cannot look like Jesus if he does not love others. The formative context to practice loving others is Christian community (c.f. 1 John 3:11-24, 4:7-5:5).

Timothy Keller writes about the formative nature of Christian community in *The Prodigal God*. He explains that “salvation is communal” and that it is impossible to be spiritually formed into the image of Christ apart from community because “there is no way you will be able to grow spiritually apart from a deep involvement in a community of other believers. You can’t live the Christian life without a band of Christian friends,

²⁵ Chan, *Spiritual Theology*, 83, 72.

without a family of believers in which you find a place.” Keller further emphasizes the connection between spiritual formation and community:

Christians commonly say they want a relationship with Jesus, that they want to ‘get to know Jesus better.’ You will never be able to do that by yourself. You must be deeply involved in the church, in Christian community, with strong relationships of love and accountability. Only if you are part of a community of believers seeking to resemble, serve, and love Jesus will you ever get to know him and grow into his likeness.²⁶

For Keller, spiritual formation is an impossible task apart from spiritual community.

One way formation occurs within spiritual community is in spiritual friendship.

Alice Fyrling explains the formative role of spiritual friendship in *Seeking God Together*:

“[Spiritual friends are] people with whom I can be forthcoming and honest about my own soul. In return, they reflect God’s love for me in their words, their attitudes and their actions. These are friends who ‘enflesh’ God for me. God loves me and nourishes my soul through these friends.”²⁷ Spiritual friendships are relationships that aid in discerning the work and presence of the Holy Spirit in the believer’s life.

In *Sacred Companions*, David Benner states, “the ultimate test of a spiritual friendship is whether all parties are growing as a result of it.” He further states:

...soul friendship is therefore a relationship to which I bring my whole self, especially my inner self. And the care that I offer for the other person in a soul friendship is a care for his or her whole self, especially the inner self. Soul friends seek to safeguard each other’s uniqueness and nurture the growth of each other’s inner self.²⁸

Spiritual friends care for one another by sharing the responsibility for spiritual growth.

Thus, “spiritual friendship” best describes intentionally formative relationships.

²⁶ Timothy Keller, *The Prodigal God: Recovering the Heart of the Christian Faith* (New York: Penguin Group (USA) Inc., 2008), 125, 127.

²⁷ Alice Fyrling, *Seeking God Together: An Introduction to Group Spiritual Direction* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 16.

²⁸ David G. Benner, *Sacred Companions: The Gift of Spiritual Friendship & Direction* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 15, 80.

Larry Crabb defines spiritual community in *Becoming a True Spiritual Community* “as a gathering of people who experience a kind of togetherness that only the Holy Spirit makes possible, who move in good directions—and want to—because the Spirit is at work.” Thus, “[a]t its core, the church is a spiritual community journeying together toward God.” Without the presence of the Spirit in relationships, a church is not a spiritual community. For, “Togetherness in Christ encourages movement toward Christ.” Indeed, “[f]orming spiritual community is the Spirit’s work. It is not ours.”²⁹ It is this shared movement toward Christ enabled by the Spirit that is the defining mark of the church as spiritually formative community. Thus, spiritual community is made up of a myriad of spiritual friendships.

Greg Peters writes in an article for the *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care* that observing the ordinances, or sacraments, in Christian community is formative:

[Spiritual formation] occurs must surely, though not exclusively, through the church of Jesus Christ especially by way of the sacraments of baptism and Eucharist. Further, there are the principal sacramental of the preaching of God’s Word as well as corporate and private prayer. Thus, in our personal experiences of receiving God’s grace by way of the sacraments and sacramental, our experience of life with and in God becomes, alongside of discursive theology, the “stuff” of spiritual theology.³⁰

Peter’s understanding of spiritual theology in Christian community is that of a melding of the theology and action of spiritual formation uniquely expressed in sacramental deeds.

The sacramental activities of the two ordinances of the church—baptism and the Lord’s Supper—point to the theological reality of the gospel at work in spiritually formative Christian community. The author is often personally moved while baptizing a

²⁹ Larry Crabb, *Becoming a True Spiritual Community: A Profound Vision of What the Church Can Be* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1999), 22, 125.

³⁰ Greg Peters, “On Spiritual Theology: A Primer,” *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care* 4, no. 1 (Spring 2011): 16-17.

new believer because of the demonstration of new life. Recently, the author temporarily stopped distributing the communion elements in order to hug a struggling alcoholic who wept while he ate and drank at the Lord's Table.

There is a missional aspect of spiritual community as well. It is in and through the church that the goal of spiritual formation is lived, displayed and shared with the world. In the Sermon, Jesus refers to the church as a "city on a hill" displaying the deeds of God.

One way the church is a "city on a hill" is through love experienced and expressed among believers. In John 13:34-35, Jesus describes how loving one another has missional implications: "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. *By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.*" Likewise, Paul's prayer for the Thessalonian church is that their love for one another would ultimately transform the world around them: "...may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another *and for all...*" (1 Thess 3:12, emphasis added). Thus, spiritual community does not exist as an end to itself, but as a medium of Christ's love for the world.

The intention of Metanoia's LTG program was to facilitate such missional and formative spiritual community. As there has been no spiritual formation assessment of Metanoia to date, it is unclear if CG's are facilitating such missional and formative living. Hence, one goal of this thesis-project is to discover in what ways Metanoia is facilitating spiritual community and what challenges Metanoia faces toward better nurturing such a formative context.

Case Study: Prayer in Christian Spirituality and the West's "New Spirituality"

Both Christians and non-Christians are spiritually formed. Christian spiritual formation is centered on the Person and work of Christ, whereas all other forms of spiritual formation are in some way idolatrous. The following case study on prayer elucidates this dichotomy and demonstrates the uniqueness of Christian spirituality.

In *The Making of the New Spirituality*, James Herrick refers to a specific form of spirituality growing in prevalence in the West as the "New Spirituality." His premise is that the "rise of the [New] Spirituality is not so much the outworking of a psychic law as the result of sustained, intentional and successful public efforts to change the Western religious mind."³¹ The rise of the New Spirituality directly challenges Christian spirituality in western culture.

According to Herrick, Christian spirituality has seven elements: "The supernatural authority of the Judeo-Christian Scriptures," "A personal, creating and wholly other God," "God's creation of the human race," "An intervening God," "Humankind's fall," "Jesus Christ as God incarnate" and a unique eschatological understanding of "Human destiny and divine judgment." The New Spirituality has seven differing elements: "History is not spiritually important," "The dominance of reason," "The spiritualization of science," "The animation of nature," "Hidden knowledge and spiritual progress," "Spiritual evolution," and "Religious pluralism as rooted in mystical experience."³² Herrick unpacks the history of the New Spirituality to show how these seven elements coalesced into an influential force in the West.

³¹ James A. Herrick, *The Making of the New Spirituality: The Eclipse of the Western Religious Tradition* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 35.

³² Herrick, *New Spirituality*, 32-35.

The author was introduced to *The Making of the New Spirituality* during his first D.Min. residency, and immediately recognized the work as a resource to understand the spiritual atmosphere of the Ellicott City area. Herrick's book helped the author understand why tolerance and spiritual openness could paradoxically exist alongside a rejection of Evangelicalism. The following case study on prayer highlights the differences between Christian spirituality and the New Spirituality. The study demonstrates one way Christian spiritual formation is endeavored not only in the Ellicott City area, but in other areas where the New Spirituality is influential.

Deepening the Relationship Between God and the Believer

Christian prayer is understood as a relational dialogue between Creator God and believers. On the other hand, the New Spirituality suggests that

...particular rational gifts and carefully studied techniques are necessary to harness and direct the energy of Mind. Even prayer, that most democratic of spiritual exercises in [Christian spirituality], is transformed... into a rational technique to be mastered. Only the skilled practitioner, not the simple person of faith, can through prayer concentrate mental energy or Mind in such a way as to unleash its healing, life-giving powers.³³

Compared to the New Spirituality's impersonal techniques to harness spiritual energy, prayer in Christian spirituality is uniquely relational in two primary ways. First, prayer deepens the relationship between God and the believer. Second, God responds to prayer.

The first relational aspect of Christian prayer—that God deepens his relationship with the believer—is found within the Sermon through relational transformation (c.f. Matt 6:19-34; 7:7-11). This relational aspect is also seen in the Biblical images of God as

³³ Herrick, *New Spirituality*, 259-260.

Father and friend, such as in Luke 11:1-13. Peterson comments on Jesus' teaching on prayer in this Scripture passage in *Tell It Slant* and underscores that the usage of the words "Father" and "friend" "trains us in personal direct address." He states,

prayer can be learned only in the vocabulary and grammar of personal relationships: Father! Friend! It can never be a matter of getting the right words in the right order. It can never be a matter of good behavior or proper disposition or skillful manipulation. It can never be a matter of acquiring some information about God or getting in touch with myself. It is a relationship, exclusively and unendingly personal.³⁴

Christian prayer is not a technique to be mastered, but a familial and friendly dialogue.

Andrew Murray explains the uniqueness of praying to Father in *With Christ In the School of Prayer*: "the secret of effective prayer is to have the heart filled with the Father-love of God. It is not enough for us to know that God is a Father. It is necessary for us to take time to meditate on what that name implies." Indeed, the "child who only wants to know the love of the father when he has something to ask will be disappointed."³⁵

Addressing God as Father in prayer facilitating the goal of Christian spiritual formation to grow in love of God.

The believer draws encouragement from the promise that Father hears his prayer. Murray says, "Christians often complain that their private prayer is not what it should be. They feel weak and sinful, and their hearts are cold and dark." Believers need not feel this way because: "when you go to private prayer your first thought must be that the Father is waiting for you there in secret.... The Lord is concerned about you the way a father is concerned about his children. Do not think about how little you have to give to

³⁴ Eugene H. Peterson, *Tell It Slant: A Conversation on the Language of Jesus In His Stories and Prayers* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008), 50-51.

³⁵ Andrew Murray, *With Christ in the School of Prayer* (New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 1981), 48-49.

God, but about how much he wants to give to you.”³⁶ The believer is encouraged and empowered in prayer because Father listens to his child.

Prayers of petition develop the relationship between God and the believer. In *Prayer: Does It Make Any Difference?* Philip Yancey points out that when Jesus told his disciples, “Your Father knows what you need before you ask him,” he did not mean that prayer was “unnecessary, for his own life belied that.” Rather, Jesus means “we need not strive to convince God to care; the Father already cares, more than we can know.” Furthermore, prayer for the disciple “is not a matter of giving God new information.” Yancey concludes that rather than presenting requests to God as if he “may not know them, it might be more appropriate to say, ‘God, you know I need this!’”³⁷ Prayers of petition develop dependence upon God as a child depends on his Father.

The second personal image that Jesus gave his disciples in Luke 11:1-13 is that of a friend. Murray encourages believers: “Let us confine ourselves to this chief thought: Prayer is an appeal to the friendship of God.” He explains that it is natural to expect a father to respond to his child and to grant him his request. However, “with a friend, it is as if the kindness were freer, dependent on sympathy and character rather than on nature.” A child is dependent upon a father, whereas with friends, the relationship is “more nearly on the same level.”³⁸ By befriending believers, God freely gives the spiritual experience that the New Spirituality vainly seeks to attain by utilizing prayer techniques to harness spiritual energy.

For instance, the author dialogued with persons in the Ellicott City area that engage in Reiki healing practices. The Reiki healing methodology is considered a

³⁶ Murray, *With Christ*, 25-26.

³⁷ Philip Yancey, *Prayer: Does It Make Any Difference?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 58.

³⁸ Murray, *With Christ*, 61, 63.

prayerful experience in which spiritual energy is passed from the healer to the one being healed. Persons the author has spoken with have experienced a spiritual power manifesting in physical ways—most often nausea! While the source of such power is without a doubt demonic, the prayer experience is not a relational dialogue between Creator and believer, but rather a harnessing of power for personal gain. In befriending believers, God neither diminishes his deity nor deifies creation.

One way believers are formed spiritually by praying to God as friend is through the discipline of importunity in prayer. Yancey suggests that the truest value of persistence in petition is “not so much that we get what we want as that we become the person we should be.” Indeed, “the internal changes wrought through prayer make possible the answers that we have long been seeking—the ‘change’ in God if you will.”³⁹ Importunity in prayer forms the image of Christ within the believer as his will is bent to that of the sovereign God’s in the same way that Jesus Christ bent his own will in submission to his Father in the Garden of Gethsemane.

In *The Prayer*, James Houston suggests there are three primary ways believers neglect approaching prayer as relationship with God. The first way is prayer as a duty, or “simply another thing we do, alongside all the other activities we pack into our lives.” When prayer is viewed this way, it becomes something we do for God and techniques become important. Rather than a duty, prayer is “more of a posture and attitude before God than a correct way of doing or saying things.” Indeed, one can perform all the

³⁹ Yancey, *Difference*, 153.

techniques correctly and never think about God at all.⁴⁰ As previously observed, prayer as technique is an aspect of the New Spirituality.

A second way prayer is approached incorrectly is as a custom or cultural activity. Houston cites prayers that become unthinking and automatic as examples of customary prayer. Positively, liturgical prayers and prayer books though passed on as traditions are not necessarily lifeless customs if one embraces the spirit behind such prayer methodology. Prayer books teach “confession before God, an aversion for sin, the desire to live in a new way, and submitting before God wholeheartedly” in addition to reinforcing the communal life of the church. With liturgical and customary prayer, the believer must remember, “true communication [with God] involves giving and receiving from both parties, so that they are in tune with each other.”⁴¹ With the right attitude, liturgical prayer is a source of vibrant communication.

A major emphasis was placed on prayer during the author’s second D.Min. residency. The D.Min. cohort was encouraged to pray through various prayer books in preparation for the residency retreat. The author utilized prayer books such as Lancelot Andrew’s *Private Devotions*, *Celtic Daily Prayer*, Phyllis Tickle’s *The Divine Hours* and *The Valley of Vision*. Coming from an Evangelical tradition in which prayer books are not utilized in corporate worship, the author found praying through the books a transforming experience. He felt connected to the universal church and developed a greater vocabulary for prayer.

The final incorrect approach is prayer as magic. In magical prayer, “spells are needed in order to coax the god into releasing power.” Houston goes straight to the

⁴⁰ James M. Houston, *The Prayer: Deepening Your Friendship With God* (Colorado Springs: Victor, 2007), 34-35, 36.

⁴¹ Houston, *Friendship With God*, 37-39.

modern health and wealth teaching of the “prosperity gospel” as an example of contemporary magical prayer. He says, “We think we have every right to ask for [health and wealth], and so prayer is brought in to work its magic on our behalf.” Prayer is also viewed magically when a believer avoids responsibility by seeking divine assistance for something that he could do within his own power. Houston warns: “We should not expect a personal, prayer-hearing God to respond to our situations with displays of magic when we can play a responsible role ourselves.”⁴² Prayer is not magical because relationship with God is personal and not formulaic.

Willard further explains the differences between prayer and magic in *Hearing God*. He describes magic as “the attempt to influence the actual course of events... by manipulation of symbolisms or special substances such as effigies and incantations.” Superstition betrays a belief in magic because it “relies on alleged causal influences that are not actually mediated through the natures of the things involved.”⁴³ Christian faith and prayer are not superstition because the power involved does not rest in the words or rituals employed, but in the person of Jesus Christ. Prayer is not a skill to be mastered, but a relationship to be endeavored.

God Responds to the Believer’s Prayer

The second relational aspect of Christian prayer is that God speaks and responds to the believer. In the Sermon, Jesus encourages his disciples to “ask, seek and knock” and promises that Father will respond (c.f. Matt 7:7-11). In The Paternoster (c.f. Matt

⁴² Houston, *Friendship With God*, 39-41.

⁴³ Dallas Willard, *Hearing God: Developing a Conversational Relationship with God* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 1999), 137-138, 140.

6:9-13), Jesus encourages his disciples to ask for Father's kingdom to come, to provide them with daily bread, to forgive them their sins and to protect them from evil. The inference is that Father will respond to the requests of his children—to teach otherwise would be cruel on Jesus' part.

Willard points out that “[h]earing God is but one dimension of a richly interactive relationship, and obtaining guidance is but one facet of hearing God.” Hearing God speak “is to be sought only as a part of a certain kind of life, a life of loving fellowship with the King and his other subjects within the kingdom of the heavens.” The ultimate goal of the disciple is not to hear God's voice, but to “be mature people in a loving relationship with him.”⁴⁴ Contrary to the neo-Gnosticism of the New Spirituality, the goal in Christian prayer is not reduced to gaining inside knowledge from God, but to commune with God.

The stories of persons who heard the voice of God throughout Scripture provide the normative guide for discerning the voice of God for Christians of all eras. Willard identifies six ways people heard the voice of God in the Bible: a phenomenon plus a voice, a supernatural messenger or angel, dreams and visions, an audible voice, the human voice and the human spirit or the “still small voice.”⁴⁵ According to Willard, God still speaks via all six of these ways today.

Of these six ways of speaking, the human voice is the “primary objective way in which God addresses us.” The human voice is “best suited to the purposes of God precisely because it most fully engages the faculties of free, intelligent beings who are socially interacting with agape love in the work of God as his collaborators and friends.” The Holy Spirit's inspiration in the writing of the Bible and subsequent reading of it is

⁴⁴ Willard, *Hearing God*, 10, 31.

⁴⁵ Willard, *Hearing God*, 91.

one example of God speaking in co-operation with the human voice. The primary subjective way God speaks is through the “still small voice,” wherewith he speaks to our own spirits affecting “our own thoughts and feelings toward ourselves as well as toward events and people around us.”⁴⁶ While the New Spirituality tends to focus solely on subjective mystical experiences, Christian spirituality affirms a balance between God-revealed objective (c.f. “authority” above) and God-revealed subjective knowledge.

Sometimes the believer has difficulty in hearing God. It may be that God is not speaking, or it might be that the believer is not listening correctly. Willard says that sometimes a believer does not hear God’s voice because he is not attuned to it. Another reason why a believer will not hear the voice of God is that he is not a “ready vessel” because he does not “stand ready to obey and change, should that be what God directs.” Such a person “could make no good use of a word from God because of how they are living.”⁴⁷ Preparing oneself to hear God involves the spiritually formative act of preparing the will, body and soul to hear and obey an actual Person.

Three spiritual disciplines the author became familiar with throughout his D.Min. journey aided him in preparing himself to hear God. The first is *Lectio Divina* by which the author tuned his ears to hear Father speak through contemplative reading of the Bible. The second is breath, or centering prayer, such as the Jesus Prayer by which the author learned to practice the presence of God and to listen for his voice throughout the day. A third discipline the author used to prepare himself to hear from God is silence—specifically, attending to the presence of God and learning to be “okay” with the fact that God may choose not to speak.

⁴⁶ Willard, *Hearing God*, 96, 99.

⁴⁷ Willard, *Hearing God*, 69, 71.

A similar concern to not hearing God is when God chooses not to answer prayer. Yancey suggests that God does not answer some prayers if they are frivolous. Frivolous prayers “are self-serving and not in accord with God’s nature” and they “put the focus on our things, not the things of God.” Another reason why prayers may not be answered is because of a flaw within the person praying, such as sinful disobedience, a lack of social concern or broken relationships. Yet another reason why God does not answer prayer is because it “simply cannot be granted.” Yancey points to the Civil War in the United States in which it is documented that both northern and southern soldiers prayed for victory—simultaneous victory for both sides was an impossible request to answer. One major reason why some prayers go unanswered is because prayer is not magical or formulaic—it is mysterious.⁴⁸ If the goal of prayer in the New Spirituality is to manipulate spiritual energy or gain inside knowledge for personal edification, unanswered prayer presents limited redemptive quality. Regardless of the reasons why the Christian God says “no” to some prayers of believers, reflecting on the possible reasons why the prayer remains unanswered conforms the believer’s will to God’s will.

God invites believers to partner with him through prayer by interceding on behalf of others for God’s continued work in redeeming creation. Murray comments on Matthew 9:37-38 that the disciples “are to make [the prayer for laborers] one of their chief petitions in prayer: that the Lord of the harvest Himself would send laborers into his harvest.” Interceding as God’s partner in the *Missio Dei* increases the believer’s desire for laborers in the mission field, and consequently will help him “believe that our labor supply depends on prayer and that prayer will really provide ‘as many as he needeth.’” Murray explains that prayer is crucial to successful mission efforts in that the “power

⁴⁸ Yancey, *Difference*, 223-227, 230.

which the Lord gives His people to exercise in heaven and earth is real; the number of laborers and the measure of the harvest does actually depend on their prayer.”⁴⁹ Thus, God invites believers to participate in the redemption of creation not only through uniting diverse persons through the reconciling work of Christ, but also through the prayers of a believing community on mission with God in the world.

This relational, listening and responding God is very different from a sad reality the author faces every day he drives into the Historic District of Ellicott City. On the drive into town along Frederick Road are a series of whitewashed row homes that fly Tibetan Buddhist prayer flags. These flags have flown for several years now, and as a result of weathering the Mid-Atlantic humid summers and blustery winter snows, they are now sun-faded and tattered. Such is the soul of those who pray not to a Person but to a force, whose hope has no eternal guarantee. Such is the soul of those who Jesus came to save and to whom his church bears salt and light.

Concluding Thoughts on Christian Spiritual Formation

In the concluding chapter of his book, Herrick demonstrates how the New Spirituality brings people to no more interesting place than where self-directed living, pantheistic spiritualities and human-centric philosophies have taken humanity in the past:

The New [Spirituality] promises to secure the soul’s triumph over external restraints including time, space, evil, other people, conventional morality and especially traditional religion. But in the process it dispenses with a transcendent and personal deity, irrevocable forgiveness of sin, triumph over death, egalitarian spiritual community and the simple joy of

⁴⁹ Murray, *With Christ*, 69-70.

accepting our unchangeable status as infinitely valuable but fallen creatures of a living and holy God.⁵⁰

On the other hand, Jesus Christ says:

...If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? For what can a man give in return for his soul? (Mark 8:34b-37)

If both spiritual paths fulfill their promises, the truly beneficial path for all of humanity is to release the grip on self-directed living and manmade spiritualities—whether they be the New Spirituality, paganism or a world religion—in order to receive salvation from Christ and experience redemptive spiritual formation.

In Christian spirituality alone the promise for hope, healing and justice is available through a personally knowable, attentively active Creator who possesses infinite resources and love for his creation. Thus, Christian spiritual formation is the only spirituality that offers hope of freedom from the root causes of vice and the powers that bend the spirit of man away from God: the bondage of sin, Satan, the world and the flesh. Through Christian spiritual formation, the spirit of man is transformed into the image of God that it was intended to be before the Fall.

It is to the context of spiritual formation, the church, that attention now turns. This thesis-project sets out to “[Address] the Spiritual Formation Needs of a New Church” through discovering current realities, determining future opportunities and designing formative curriculum. The remaining two chapters of this thesis-project demonstrate how this was researched and explored in Metanoia. Chapter 4 begins with a look at the methodology utilized and the results of a spiritual formation assessment of Metanoia.

⁵⁰ Herrick, *New Spirituality*, 279-280.

CHAPTER 4
PROJECT DESIGN: CONDUCTING A SPIRITUAL FORMATION ASSESSMENT
OF METANOIA CHURCH

Don't hoard treasure down here where it gets eaten by moths and corroded by rust or—worse!—stolen by burglars. Stockpile treasure in heaven, where it's safe from moth and rust and burglars. It's obvious, isn't it? The place where your treasure is, is the place you will most want to be, and end up being.

— Jesus Christ, Matthew 6:19-21 (The Message)

With conviction, I speak of spiritual community as a gathering of people who experience a kind of togetherness that only the Holy Spirit makes possible, who move in good directions—and want to—because the Spirit is at work.... At its core, the church is a spiritual community journeying together toward God.

— Larry Crabb, *Becoming a True Spiritual Community*

Research Methodology

This chapter details the research methodology employed to assess current spiritual formation realities of Metanoia Church. The assessment was conducted utilizing two survey research methods: a church-wide survey and two focus group interviews of selected Partners. The following explains how the survey and focus group interviews were conducted. The data gathered through both methods is presented with limited observations. Chapter 5 analyzes, interprets and applies the data to develop formative curriculum for Metanoia.

Spiritual Formation Questionnaire

The Spiritual Formation Questionnaire (survey) utilized to gather data for this thesis-project consisted of an adaptation of Adele Calhoun's "Spiritual Growth Planner," Appendix 1 of her *Handbook*.¹ The Spiritual Growth Planner (Planner) assesses spiritual formation realities in seven areas (survey "sections" below): Worship the Trinity, Open Myself to God, Relinquish the False Self and Idols of Your Heart, Share My Life, Hear God's Word, Incarnate Christ's Love and Pray My Life.

Each section begins with two open-ended format questions (essay questions). Following these two questions is a chart to evaluate four-to-six categories related to the area of spiritual formation. Responses are given on a modified Likert scale according to each category being "Not True," "Needs Improvement," "Most of the Time" or "Consistently True." Following the chart, the section concludes with a question to "choose one or two categories that you resonate with and that touch on a longing to go deeper with God."

The adaption of Calhoun's Planner consisted of removing the introductory and conclusion remarks and streamlining transitional verbiage between each category. Additionally, demographic questions were added to the beginning of the survey to gather general information of those surveyed. The questions gathered data on gender, length of time as a believer in Jesus, length of time as a Partner with Metanoia, whether or not those surveyed are in a CG and whether or not they participated in the LTG program.

A letter of informed consent explaining the purpose and goals of the research was attached to each survey. The consent explained that all responses are confidential and will

¹ Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices That Transform Us* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 256-263.

be reported in summary form in this D.Min. thesis-project, in a report to the Metanoia leadership and possibly in future publications. Those surveyed gave informed consent by printing and signing their names on the hardcopies of the survey or, in the case of using the online version, digitally agreeing to the informed consent by confirming their identity with their email address. The Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary (GCTS) Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved both the informed consent and survey prior to distribution. The informed consent and survey are found in Appendix 1.

The survey was conducted during a four-week period between September 18 and October 13, 2011. Hardcopies of the survey were distributed to all persons present—Partners and non-Partners—immediately following the Worship Gatherings on Sundays, September 18 and 25 and October 2 and 9. Time and space were allotted for individuals to complete the survey and return it on the same day.

An online version of the survey was made available via SurveyGizmo² for those persons who were for some reason unable to complete hardcopies. An email invitation to take the online version of the survey was sent on September 30 only to those Partners who had not yet submitted a hardcopy version. Data from hardcopy versions was manually entered into the SurveyGizmo site by the author after the survey closed on October 9. Online and hardcopy data is reported below in combined, summary form.

Thirty-five surveys were returned over the four weeks that the survey was distributed. At the time of writing, average weekly Worship Gathering (WG) attendance is 55 persons, therefore roughly 64% of the attenders completed the survey. Not every

² SurveyGizmo, “SurveyGizmo,” Widgix, LLC, <http://www.surveygizmo.com/> (accessed November 11, 2011). At the time of writing, SurveyGizmo offers students one year free at Enterprise level.

question was answered by every person submitting a questionnaire. When appropriate, the number of persons responding to each question is reported in the data below.

Focus Group Interviews

While the survey predominantly collected quantitative data, some qualitative data was collected via the fourteen essay questions. Two focus group interviews were held to provide an additional avenue for collecting qualitative data to assess Metanoia's current spiritual formation realities. The focus groups were conducted on Monday, September 26, 2011 in the Metanoia Church Worship Gathering space. The first focus group (FG) began at 6:00pm and consisted of three males and two females. The second began immediately afterward at 7:30pm and consisted of two males and four females.

Metanoia's Elders selected a representative group from among the Partnership to receive invitations to the FG interviews. Thus, the eleven persons interviewed in the FGs consisted of single and married adults; parents and non-parents; persons of Asian, black and white ethnicity; new believers and veteran saints; new and more established Partners; ministry leaders and non-leaders; persons serving in ministry and persons not serving. Only one person invited to participate in the focus group interviews was unable to do so.

FG participants were provided with an informed consent document two weeks prior to the FG interviews. Participants read the consent document on their own and later reviewed it in person with the author before signing it. The GCTS IRB approved the informed consent prior to its distribution. The GCTS IRB also approved the nine questions asked during the interviews. The consent document is provided in Appendix 2

and the questions are listed both in Appendix 3 and later in this chapter as the organizational means to report the FG data in summary form.

Both FG interviews were conducted by Dr. Randy Millwood, Team Strategist for Leadership Development and Support Coach with the Baptist Convention of Maryland/Delaware. Dr. Millwood served as the author's spiritual director for the duration of his D.Min. studies. The author asked Dr. Millwood to conduct the interviews in order to reduce the potential risk of biased responding as a result of the author's presence at the FG. The author introduced Dr. Millwood and answered questions prior to the interviews beginning and then left the room until the FG concluded. Interviews were recorded via video camera and digital audio recording. FG participants were not compensated in any way.

Gathering Data: Spiritual Formation Questionnaire

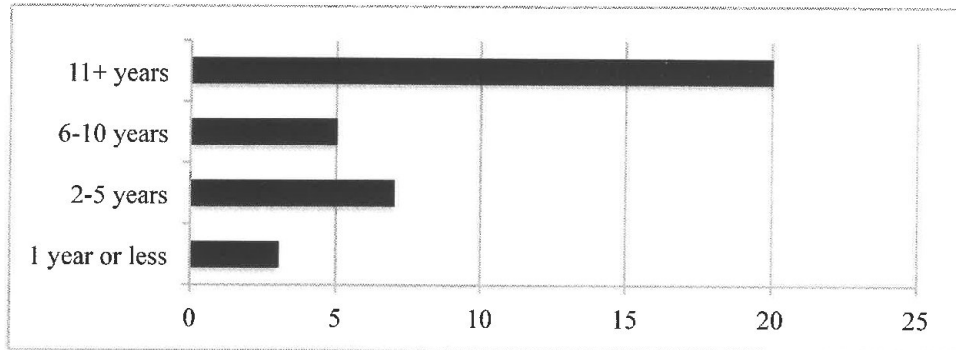
The following is a summary report of the spiritual formation questionnaire data.

Demographic Data

The following are the results of the six demographic questions that preceded the adaption of Calhoun's Planner. Of the surveys submitted, sixteen were submitted by men (45.7%) and nineteen by women (54.3%). Of those surveyed, thirty-three (94.3%) are actively involved in a Community Group. Roughly two-thirds of those surveyed—twenty-two persons (62.9%)—participated in the LTG program.

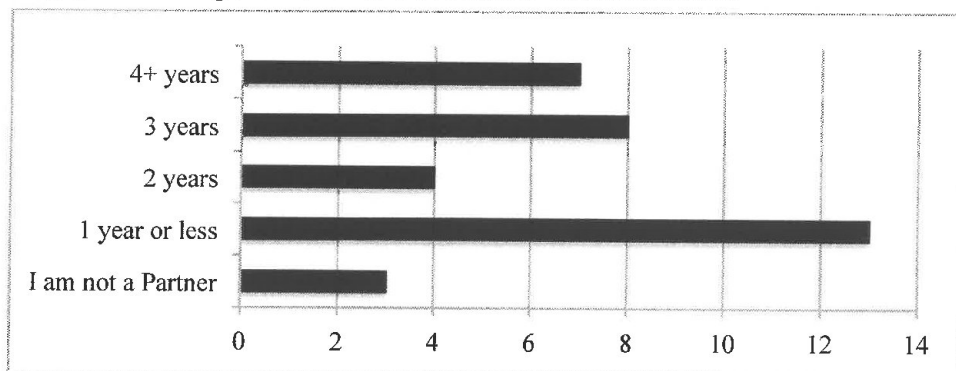
No person indicated that they were not yet a believer in Jesus. Three persons indicated they have been a believer in Jesus for one or less years (8.6%), seven for two-to-five years (20%), five for six-to-ten years (14.3%) and twenty for eleven or more years (57.1%). The graph below shows how long those surveyed have been believers in Jesus:

Figure 4.1. Length of time as a believer in Jesus Christ



Only three of the thirty-five persons (8.6%) surveyed were not Partners. The remaining thirty-two Partners represent 80% of the total adult Partnership body of forty persons at the time of writing. Of those indicating they are Partners, thirteen have been Partners for one year or less (37.1%), four for two or less years (11.4%), eight for three or less years (22.9%) and seven for four or more years (20%). The graph below shows how long persons surveyed were Partners.

Figure 4.2. Length of time as a Metanoia Church Partner



Three observations are made from the demographics of those surveyed. First, the majority of those completing surveys are “veteran saints,” meaning that they have

believed in Jesus Christ for at least six years (71.4%). Second, a moderate majority of those surveyed (57.1%) are relatively new Partners of two years or less, or are not yet a Partner. Lastly, one-third of those surveyed did not participate in the LTG program and may not be familiar with it.

The following is a summary report of the remaining survey data organized according to the seven sections of Calhoun's Planner.

Section 1: Worship the Trinity

Essay Question 1.1: Am I celebrating the love and glory of God with reverence and joy (Psalm 95:1-7)? Explain.

Several of the thirty-four persons responding to this question indicated actions that enable them to celebrate God. Predominant actions listed were singing and prayer—five and four total responses respectively—with others mentioning meditation, practicing God's presence and reflection. Three individuals wrote that they celebrate the love and glory of God through his creation or in nature. For instance, one of these individuals stated they celebrate God “[p]rimarily through song and engaging with nature.”

Five individuals acknowledged that their measure of celebrating God tends to be contingent upon life circumstances. The following serve as examples: “It depends on the day & season,” “...ebbs and flows of life sometimes dictate my joy in God” and “Sometimes I struggle with a depressive mood/attitude & very conscientiously try to be thankful/joyful, but it is difficult some days.” One person indicated that the fluctuation they experience depends less on circumstance and more on the attention placed upon

their attention to their Christian spiritual formation: “Sometimes when I am walking in the Spirit celebrating his love & glory is natural.”

Essay Question 1.2: Where am I longing to move into deeper celebration of God?

Specific means—or spiritual disciplines—were mentioned as ways individuals desired to move into deeper celebration of God. Five of the thirty-three persons responding to this question wrote of a need to “study the Bible [more],” “enjoy reading the Bible” and similar responses that reflect a desire to celebrate God through disciplines of the Word. Four others expressed a desire to celebrate God through acts of service. Two persons mentioned a specific desire to practice an intentional Sabbath.

In addition to spiritual disciplines, some responders indicated attitudes of the heart that they long to cultivate in order to move into deeper celebration of God. For instance: “Fully committing to worship,” “Peace in the busy tasks he has set me” and “During day to day moments, remembering Him at work, at home, when I’m frustrated, when I feel sad.” Of interest are three persons that expressed a desire to grow in their trust of God. One person said, “I long to trust Him more deeply” while another expressed a desire for “[g]rowing a deep faith and trust in God.”

Spiritual Growth Results

Table 4.1. Worship the Trinity spiritual growth results

	Not True		Needs Improvement		Most of the Time		Consistently True		Total
	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	#
I am aware of God's presence in my life, confident of his love for me and intentionally celebrate our connection.	0.0%	0	17.1%	6	40.0%	14	42.9%	15	35
Worshipping with fellow believers gives me a deep sense of joy and God's presence.	0.0%	0	8.6%	3	37.1%	13	54.3%	19	35
I take time to celebrate God and acknowledge my limits by deeply entering into a weekly Sabbath day that is different from every other day.	18.2%	6	51.5%	17	27.3%	9	3.0%	1	33
I am aware of where I place people, experiences and images before God.	0.0%	0	22.9%	8	62.9%	22	14.3%	5	35
I am a joyful, thankful person who expresses gratitude to God and others easily and often.	0.0%	0	25.7%	9	40.0%	14	34.3%	12	35

According to the data above, two strengths—meaning they received a higher percentage of markings in either the “Most of the Time” or “Consistently True” column—are the first category involving awareness of God’s presence and the second category involving worshipping with fellow believers. The first category received 82.9% markings in the strength columns while the latter received 91.4%.

The only weak category—meaning it received either a higher percentage of markings in the “Not True” or “Needs Improvement” column—is “I take time to celebrate God and acknowledge my limits by deeply entering into a weekly Sabbath day

that is different from every other day.” This category received a combined total of 69.7% of the weak columns. For the purposes of data observations below, “strengths” and “weaknesses” are defined according to the aforementioned descriptions.

Identifying Longings Results

The following table indicates the one or two categories that those surveyed “resonate with and that touch on a longing to go deeper with God.” There were twenty-nine responders to this question, meaning twenty-nine of the thirty-five persons submitting surveys indicated one or two areas of longing. Percentages for this and all “longing” tables are percentages of those that responded, not of total responses. For instance, in the table below, nine of twenty-nine persons marked the first category. Thus, 31% of those who responded to this question indicated the first category as a longing.

Table 4.2. Worship the Trinity identifying longings results

Area of Longing	Count	Percent %
I am aware of God's presence in my life, confident of his love for me and intentionally celebrate our connection.	9	31.0%
Worshipping with fellow believers gives me a deep sense of joy and God's presence.	6	20.7%
I take time to celebrate God and acknowledge my limits by deeply entering into a weekly Sabbath day that is different from every other day.	15	51.7%
I am aware of where I place people, experiences and images before God.	5	17.2%
I am a joyful, thankful person who expresses gratitude to God and others easily and often.	12	41.4%

The category for observing Sabbath is the greatest longing among those who indicated their spiritual longings (51.7%). When broken down among gender lines, two additional nuances emerge. First, of the nine persons expressing a longing in the first category involving an awareness of God’s presence in their lives, seven were female

(77.8%). Secondly, of the persons expressing a longing in the final category involving being a joyful person, the majority is also female with nine of twelve responses (75%).

Section 2: Open Myself to God

Essay Question 2.1: How am I opening myself to God in deeper ways?

Several individuals indicated a desire to open themselves to God in deeper ways by submitting their will to God's will. For instance, one individual responded, "Currently I [have] been trying to let go of control [and] letting God's will be done." Another wrote, "I am doing this by actively seeking help and discerning with God's guidance which paths to take. I am striving to be open minded to hear what He is communicating to me without specific expectation." For these persons, opening themselves to God occurs as they submit to his will.

Five of the thirty-two individuals who responded to this question specifically noted a desire to be still, to listen to God or to be silent before Him. Responses include: "Intentional silence and rest throughout my day," "I've been running without music to be more open to God" and "Recently, I have consistently spent time reading [and] listening to God before bed." One individual melded their desire to be quiet before the Lord with their desire to subordinate personal will to God's will: "I seek stillness so as to listen... I pray 'not my will, but your will be done' daily."

Essay Question 2.2: Where am I longing to let go of defenses and busyness so I can become more open to God's activity in my life?

Seven of the thirty-four responses to this question indicate a longing to let go of defenses and busyness to become more open to God's activity in their life in the workplace. Another three indicate this desire in their home. Three persons expressed a desire to practice a regular Sabbath. One of them wrote, "I really need to focus on a Sabbath that is meaningful and consistent."

Nine responders indicated a desire to better manage their time and control their schedule in order to be open to God. One person lamented, "I long to let go completely of worry over the future. I am so busy at home, God hardly has elbow room." Another individual wrote that there are "[m]any competing priorities [and] responsibilities at home [and] work—I can't even meet bare minimum for these in my life, and thus it is difficult to take on more." These individuals expressed a desire to be more open to God, but do not see how this is possible with their current pace of life. Some indicate that it may not be possible without making time management and priority changes.

Some of these individuals wrote they are taking steps to overcome this obstacle to their spiritual growth. One observed, "I recognize that my commitments [and] responsibilities aren't going to go away—so it is my prayer that they would consume less of my heart—or at least my emotional resources—so that in them [and] through them I might enjoy fellowship with God." One person wrote that they are trying to let go "[i]n how I spend my time and prioritizing time for rest. And by limiting the things I commit to so that I can ensure I can fulfill my commitments." Another person explained how they are taking steps by "working to simplify my demands on self in a balanced fashion that

devotes more time to God. Which means shaving off a bit in each area.” Another person explained the motivation behind their attempts to control their time and schedule: “I am trying to make time with him more of a priority and trying to be still and quiet so I can hear his voice. I want to be more discerning about what activities are just distractions.”

Spiritual Growth Results

Table 4.3. Open Myself to God spiritual growth results

	Not True		Needs Improvement		Most of the Time		Consistently True		Total
	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	#
I regularly and intentionally make space in my life for prayerfully listening to God at home, at work and with others.	0.0%	0	60.0%	21	37.1%	13	2.9%	1	35
I can admit my mistakes, weaknesses and growing edges to God as well as others.	0.0%	0	14.3%	5	57.1%	20	28.6%	10	35
I enjoy time spent alone with God in quiet reflection.	2.9%	1	23.5%	8	47.1%	16	26.5%	9	34
I recognize and live freely within my limits. I pay attention to my feelings, my body, my losses and my needs.	2.9%	1	28.6%	10	40.0%	14	28.6%	10	35
I don't need to be doing something for God or others in order to feel good about myself.	25.7%	9	20.0%	7	42.9%	15	11.4%	4	35

The first category in the table above indicates a weakness in the area of regularly and intentionally making space to listen to God (60.0%). On the other hand, the second,

third and fourth categories indicate strengths with 85.7%, 73.6% and 68.6% respectively. Those categories involve authenticity before God and others, enjoying time alone with God in quiet reflection and recognizing and living within limits.

Identifying Longings Results

Thirty-one persons responded to the indicating longings question for this section.

Table 4.4. Open Myself to God identifying longings results

Area of Longing	Count	Percent %
I regularly and intentionally make space in my life for prayerfully listening to God at home, at work and with others.	14	45.2%
I can admit my mistakes, weaknesses and growing edges to God as well as others.	7	22.6%
I enjoy time spent alone with God in quiet reflection.	11	35.5%
I recognize and live freely within my limits. I pay attention to my feelings, my body, my losses and my needs.	8	25.8%
I don't need to be doing something for God or others in order to feel good about myself.	5	16.1%

The longing that received the most responses is the first category involving regular and intentional space for prayerfully listening to God. A breakdown of the markings for this table reveals no significant differences between genders except in this category and a slight difference in a second one. Of the fourteen persons indicating the first category as a longing, ten of them were female (71.4%). A slight measurable difference also exists among the gender breakdown in the fourth category involving living within limits and paying attention to feelings. Of the eight indicating this category as a longing, five were male (62.5%).

Section 3: Relinquish the False Self and Idols of Your Heart

Essay Question 3.1: How am I growing in self-awareness and becoming more authentic in my relationships?

CGs have provided a formative environment for many persons to grow in self-awareness and to become more authentic in their relationships. One person wrote that they are growing in this area by “[c]onfessing my sins to members in my CG.” Another individual stated that they are growing by “being transparent [with] friends [and] community group who help hold me accountable.” Two persons indicated that CG discussions help them in this area.

Many of the thirty-two persons who responded to this question indicated a desire to intentionally reach out to others. One person wrote, “I am attempting to be more open and honest and talk to people about my feelings.” Others wrote: “I am trying to be more available to people and intentionally seek out times to spend with them,” “Making more effort in reaching out to people. Meeting people on a more personal level” and “Reducing the amount of ‘things to do’ in my life and allowing time for engaging with people I don’t have strong relationships with.” This indicates that while Metanoia has an environment that fosters authenticity in CGs, there is still margin to grow in authenticity.

Self-awareness is a strength for some. One person wrote they are “more aware of God’s voice and leading in my daily life [and] more open to share it [with] others.” Two others indicated growth in authenticity to share “struggles/joys” and “tragedy” with others. Another observed, “Over the past year, I’ve become more aware of my sinful

attitudes[.] [A]nger quickly can become inappropriate talk or behavior [and] more need for self-control in relationships.”

Other specific sins and errant attitudes are mentioned in this essay question:

- Three persons wrote about judging others. One of these persons wrote, “I try to focus on myself and get the plank out of my own eye before judging others... and that plank keeps me busy enough.”
- Two persons indicated an overly self-focused life.
- One person is “Learning... not to find my value through relationships but giving sacrificially.”
- One person is “learning to be satisfied [with] my identity in Christ, so that I can be free to meet people wherever they are.”

Additional sins with which persons struggle are mentioned in the second essay question.

Essay Question 3.2: Where am I longing to let go of secondary things so I can give myself more authentically to God and others?

Specific sins and errant attitudes are identified in this category with “secondary things” desired to be let go of. Four of the thirty-four persons responding to this question expressed a desire to overcome thoughts and feelings of accusation or self-loathing with words and phrases like “sin of the past,” “grief,” “guilt,” “self-pity” and “inadequacy/unapproval.” Three persons each mentioned the following:

- excessive attention to comfort and security
- desire to be approved of by others: “[p]eople pleasing,” the “opinions of other people about me” and “what others think of me”
- performance and achievement: “Achievement,” “perfectionism,” “performance,” “sense of competence,” “personal performance [and] expectations” and “success”

Two persons each wrote about the following:

- career
- controlling attitude

- self-focus and pride
- polar sins of busy-ness and laziness
- relationships with persons of negative influence, of which one responder wrote: “I’m longing to let go [of] hanging with friend[s] at the bar after work when I can use that time more wise and share with God or help others...”

Additional sins and errant attitudes that received only one mention by responders include:

- fear of sharing faith or lack of acknowledging Christ in the work place
- exercise
- possessiveness
- desire for possessions
- sexual sins

Responders generally linked secondary things to attitudes rather than actions.

Spiritual Growth Results

Table 4.5. Relinquish the False Self and Idols of Your Heart spiritual growth results

	Not True		Needs Improvement		Most of the Time		Consistently True		Total
	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	#
I am aware of my sin and blind spots and how they hurt others. I easily apologize to others and seek to live out my true self in Christ.	0.0%	0	28.6%	10	57.1%	20	14.3%	5	35
I am able to leave the crowded, noisy world of acclaim and doing behind, retreating into silence and solitude with God and letting him restore me.	6.1%	2	66.7%	22	21.2%	7	6.1%	2	33
I recognize the voice and activity of the Holy Spirit in my life.	0.0%	0	32.4%	11	58.8%	20	8.8%	3	34
I recognize my addictions and compulsions, and am committed to living free of them.	5.7%	2	17.1%	6	54.3%	19	22.9%	8	35

One weakness stands out in the data above: the second category involving leaving the crowded world to retreat into silence and solitude with God (72.8%). The three remaining categories indicate only a slim majority in the strength columns. Of these three, the stronger is recognizing addictions and compulsions (77.2%) followed closely by an awareness of sin and blind spots (71.4%).

Identifying Longings Results

Thirty-two persons responded to the indicating longings question for this section.

Table 4.6. Relinquish the False Self and Idols of Your Heart
identifying longings results

Area of Longing	Count	Percent %
I am aware of my sin and blind spots and how they hurt others. I easily apologize to others and seek to live out my true self in Christ.	8	25.0%
I am able to leave the crowded, noisy world of acclaim and doing behind, retreating into silence and solitude with God and letting him restore me.	15	46.9%
I recognize the voice and activity of the Holy Spirit in my life.	14	43.8%
I recognize my addictions and compulsions, and am committed to living free of them.	8	25.0%

As seen above, the second and third categories each received roughly twice as many responses as the first and fourth categories. Females placed the majority of responses in these two categories. In the second category involving silence and solitude, nine of the fifteen responses were by females (60%). For example, in the third category involving recognizing the voice and activity of the Holy Spirit, nine of the fourteen responses were by females (64.3%). The first and fourth categories of eight responses were split evenly between males and females.

Section 4: Share My Life

Essay Question 4.1: Am I connecting with God and others in a caring community?

Explain.

Persons within the Metanoia community are connecting with God and others in “caring community.” Sixteen of the thirty-two persons who responded to this question—exactly half of the responses—began their response with the word “yes.” CGs tend were the primary avenues for responders to experience caring community:

“My CG is really open and intimate. We share [with each other and] grow [with] God together.”

“My community group has been a wonderful example of caring community over the past year.”

“I think community group has helped me in sharing with others while we endeavor to develop deeper relationships with God.”

CGs are environments that foster care.

Six persons answered this question negatively. One person indicated they are changing CGs because they do not feel cared for in their current CG. One person wrote, “Not much, feel some wall between!” Another individual acknowledged that their own lack of participation in CG is the reason they are not experiencing caring community. Two others wrote that they pursued prayer and ministry groups outside of the Metanoia community due to their needs not being met within the church.

Essay Question 4.2: How am I longing to be with others in spiritual community?

In answering this essay question, four of the thirty persons responding to this question indicated they desire to be with others in spiritual community through service. One of these individuals wrote, “I would like to be connected [and] work with people who care about social justice [and] bringing people to God, even if it means sacrifice.”

Related to this idea of serving others, another individual responded with a desire to evangelize: “I wish to learn from others who are further in their spiritual journey and can help me [along] the way. I also wish to help others to come to Christ.” Yet another person indicated a missional or evangelistic desire, stating “It would be wonderful to be able to spend more time with my neighbors in a spiritual/worshiping context.” In all, eight of the thirty total responses indicate a longing for outward focus—through service, mission and evangelism—to fostering spiritual community.

On the other hand, eighteen responses indicate a desire to foster deepening fellowship within the church. Two of these persons mentioned a desire for accountability. One person lamented, “I miss a high-impact spiritual community in which our Bible study informs our daily lives, where Scripture—and one another—holds us accountable.” Two others indicated a desire for informal or organic community that exists beyond the church’s scheduled activities. One of these two wrote, “‘Doing life together’ though it is a cliché, I would like to engage with others in a way that doesn’t require scheduling and appointments.” Another two of the eighteen indicated a sense of losing touch with persons in the Metanoia community. For instance, “I wish the church was a closer knit group. I often don’t know what’s going on with others.”

Spiritual Growth Results

Table 4.7. Share My Life spiritual growth results

	Not True		Needs Improvement		Most of the Time		Consistently True		Total
	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	#
I have a relationship with someone who helps me grow in my spiritual walk.	2.9%	1	11.4%	4	20.0%	7	65.7%	23	35
I feel comfortable opening my home, my heart, my faith and my life to people not in my family.	2.9%	1	8.8%	3	32.4%	11	55.9%	19	34
I am not judgmental toward others. I know how to make peace and deal with anger in constructive ways. I am not argumentative and contentious.	2.9%	1	26.5%	9	52.9%	18	17.6%	6	34
Others describe me as honest, vulnerable, open and approachable.	0.0%	0	15.2%	5	57.6%	19	27.3%	9	33
I am not hypersensitive and easily offended. I give and receive love freely and easily.	5.9%	2	17.6%	6	64.7%	22	11.8%	4	34

All five categories in this section are strengths. Only one category received more than a quarter of the markings in weak columns: the third category involving not being judgmental toward others (29.4%). The category with the highest markings is the second category involving opening the home (88.3%).

Identifying Longings Results

Thirty-one persons responded to the indicating longings question for this section.

Table 4.8. Share My Life identifying longings results

Area of Longing	Count	Percent %
I have a relationship with someone who helps me grow in my spiritual walk.	8	25.8%
I feel comfortable opening my home, my heart, my faith and my life to people not in my family.	9	29.0%
I am not judgmental toward others. I know how to make peace and deal with anger in constructive ways. I am not argumentative and contentious.	15	48.4%
Others describe me as honest, vulnerable, open and approachable.	5	16.1%
I am not hypersensitive and easily offended. I give and receive love freely and easily.	10	32.3%

The majority of the longings fall in the weakest category in the previous table: not being judgmental toward others (48.4%). Of the fifteen persons indicating this as a longing, ten were female (66.7%). The fifth category, indicating not being hypersensitive or easily offended, also received a majority of female responses: seven of ten (70%).

Section 5: Hear God's Word

Essay Question 5.1: Am I cultivating the knowledge of God, the character of Christ and the presence of the Spirit in my life (John 16:5-15)? Explain.

Thirty-two persons responded to this question, ten of which indicated that they are cultivating the knowledge of God, the character of Christ and the presence of the Spirit through disciplines involving Scripture. Four of these ten persons indicated that prayer also helps them. Only two of the other twenty-two responders who did not mention Scripture mentioned prayer as a means by which they are experiencing growth in this area. Other spiritual disciplines mentioned in responses may include Scripture reading:

conversations with CG members, meditating on the sermon, quiet times and devotions, accountability, reading Christian literature, meditation and solitude.

Twelve of the thirty-two responses indicated a deficit in this area. One person wrote, “I’m trying to, but I feel that it is a slow and stifled process.” Another wrote, “Probably not consistently, no.” Yet another indicated that this as an area of desired growth: “I want to make this a priority.” Thus, while the majority of responders appear to practice disciplines that enable them to cultivate the knowledge of God, the character of Christ and the presence of the Spirit, a sizable portion either are not practicing such disciplines or are not experiencing growth via their current discipline regimen.

Essay Question 5.2: Do I want to connect more deeply with God and his Word? If so, how?

All thirty-five persons who responded to this essay question did so in the affirmative. Eighteen responders indicated a desire to read and study Scripture more—specifically through deepening knowledge of Scripture and through application to daily life. One of these persons wrote, “I sometimes find myself reading His Word just to read it. I want to internalize it.” Another person wrote: “I miss the sustained, spirit-filled quiet times of college [and] our early married life. That will come again—but in the meantime, I want to hear His voice through Scripture, not as an obligation but as a natural outgrowth of our relationship.”

Five persons specifically indicated a desire to connect more deeply with God and his Word through prayer. Other disciplines mentioned include journaling and solitude. A

general sense of carving out time for contemplation appeared throughout responses as well: “More prolonged time sitting with the word and reading it,” “By redirecting my idle time,” “read more and get away in a solitary place,” “I want to make time,” “Open my eyes, my ears, my hands, my feet,” “I want to make it more of a priority and less of a task on a to do list.”

Two additional responses are of interest. One person wrote that they desire LTGs as a means to connect more deeply with God and his Word, specifically by the way LTGs offered “[s]trong accountability in small groups.” A second person wrote: “Very much so but I don’t know how.” These two responses indicate the importance of having a spiritual formation curriculum for Metanoia so that persons have an avenue through which they can learn how to connect more deeply with God and his Word.

Spiritual Growth Results

Table 4.9. Hear God’s Word spiritual growth results

	Not True		Needs Improvement		Most of the Time		Consistently True		Total
	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	#
I am growing in biblical literacy and how scriptural truth intersects with my life.	0.0%	0	31.4%	11	62.9%	22	5.7%	2	35
On a regular basis I am nourished by spending time with God and his Word.	2.9%	1	38.2%	13	47.1%	16	11.8%	4	34
The Bible is alive and interesting to me.	0.0%	0	17.1%	6	60.0%	21	22.9%	8	35
I have a plan for reading Scripture.	15.2%	5	42.4%	14	21.2%	7	21.2%	7	33

The first and third categories—growing in Biblical literacy and “the Bible is alive and interesting to me”—received markings indicating these are categories of strength. They received 68.6% and 82.9% in the strength columns respectively. The fourth category regarding having a plan for reading Scripture is the greatest weakness. This category received 57.6% markings in the weakness columns. The second category dealing with being nourished by spending time with God and his Word is also a strength.

Identifying Longings Results

Thirty-one persons responded to the indicating longings question for this section.

Table 4.10. Hear God’s Word identifying longings results

Area of Longing	Count	Percent %
I am growing in biblical literacy and how scriptural truth intersects with my life.	12	38.7%
On a regular basis I am nourished by spending time with God and his Word.	15	48.4%
The Bible is alive and interesting to me.	9	29.0%
I have a plan for reading Scripture.	9	29.0%

There are two interesting results to note regarding this chart. First, the category that indicated marginal strength in the previous table, the second category dealing with being nourished by spending time with God and his Word, received the majority of responses as a spiritual longing. Ten of the fifteen persons (66.7%) who marked this as a longing were female. The second point of interest is that the category that indicated greatest weakness, category four involving a plan for reading Scripture, was tied with another category for the least longing. Thus, while the majority of those surveyed indicated lacking a plan for reading Scripture, this does not necessarily correlate to being their greatest spiritual longing regarding God’s Word.

Section 6: Incarnate Christ's Love

Essay Question 6.1: Am I contributing myself and my God-given gifts for the growth of Christ's kingdom? Explain.

Six of the thirty-two responses to this essay question indicated service within Metanoia ministries and missions as a way persons contribute themselves and their God-given gifts for the growth of Christ's kingdom. Three indicated they do this through tithing and five others indicated they do this through sharing their faith with non-believers. Three persons indicated they desire to do more in this area, and that an unbalanced lifestyle prevents them from doing so. One person responded with a uniquely missional perspective: "I feel that my chosen profession is what God has called me to do." This person believes that through their particular vocation, they are advancing Christ's kingdom.

Essay Question 6.2: How am I giving myself and my resources away to God and others?

The two most common means persons are giving away themselves and their resources are time and money. In fact, fourteen of the thirty-three persons responding to this question specifically used the word "time." Twelve of the thirty-three responses specifically indicated giving away finances to the church and/or to those in need.

Other ways those surveyed give themselves and their resources away to God and others are by serving at homeless shelters, preparing meals, opening their homes, praying

for others, serving with Metanoia ministries, raising their children, loving their spouses, giving attention, intentionally listening to others and working with youth. Three responses indicate a strong missional perspective where “giving” involves both the church and broader community:

“I help with the work of my hands. I lend an ear to those at work and A.A. seeking help. I give away a good bit of our financial resources. I look for other opportunities to give.”

“I try to give as much of my time as possible into serving others. I try to reach out to the members of our community to help in whatever way I can. We invite people into our home to share our food and time with them.”

“I use my gifts in the church gathering. I try to be an open vessel at work to speak to co-workers about God. I support missionaries [and] a child in poverty with my finances. I open my home to others.”

Spiritual Growth Results

In the table below (4.11), four of the six categories in this table show at least 60% combined percentage in the strength columns: the first category of working for justice (73.6%), the second for being just and fair in dealing with others (91.5%), the fourth category involving setting aside one’s agenda to share possessions, skills and time with others (65.7%) and the fifth category regarding the fruit of the Spirit being evident in one’s life (77.2%). The remaining two categories both indicate a marginal strength of between 50-60% in the strength columns. The results from this section indicate that to “Incarnate Christ’s Love” is a spiritual formation strength for Metanoia.

Table 4.11. Incarnate Christ's Love spiritual growth results

	Not True		Needs Improvement		Most of the Time		Consistently True		Total
	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	#
I work for justice and have a heart for the dispossessed and needy that is visible to others.	5.9%	2	20.6%	7	47.1%	16	26.5%	9	34
I am just and fair in dealing with others. I honor my contracts and commitments, even if they inconvenience me.	0.0%	0	8.6%	3	48.6%	17	42.9%	15	35
I know my gifts and contribute them to the kingdom of God. I am more concerned about building God's kingdom than my own.	0.0%	0	50.0%	17	44.1%	15	5.9%	2	34
I willingly set aside my agenda in order to share my possessions, skills and time with others.	2.9%	1	31.4%	11	45.7%	16	20.0%	7	35
The fruit of the Spirit is more and more evident in my life.	0.0%	0	22.9%	8	68.6%	24	8.6%	3	35
People with problems, needs, sorrows and losses seek me out. They know I care.	5.9%	2	35.3%	12	50.0%	17	8.8%	3	34

Identifying Longings

Thirty-two persons responded to the indicating longings question for this section.

The results are recorded in the table below (4.12).

Table 4.12. Incarnate Christ's Love identifying longings results

Area of Longing	Count	Percent %
I work for justice and have a heart for the dispossessed and needy that is visible to others.	8	25.0%
I am just and fair in dealing with others. I honor my contracts and commitments, even if they inconvenience me.	1	3.1%
I know my gifts and contribute them to the kingdom of God. I am more concerned about building God's kingdom than my own.	11	34.4%
I willingly set aside my agenda in order to share my possessions, skills and time with others.	7	21.9%
The fruit of the Spirit is more and more evident in my life.	5	15.6%
People with problems, needs, sorrows and losses seek me out. They know I care.	15	46.9%

The category indicating greatest longing is the sixth involving helping people through their struggles (46.9%). Of the fifteen persons that indicated this as a longing, nine were female (60%) and six were male (40%). Greater differences among the genders is evident in three other categories of longing.

First is the first category involving working for justice in which six of the eight responses were male (75%). Second, is the fifth category involving the fruit of the Spirit being evident in one's life where four of the five responses were female (80%). The third category of longing indicating gender difference is category four, setting aside one's agenda, where five of the seven responses were from females (71.4%).

Section 7: Pray My Life

Essay Question 7.1: Am I attending to God's activity in my life and listening to him on a regular basis? Explain.

Twelve of the thirty-two persons responding to this question answered it negatively. Many of these twelve individuals indicated that they are unsure if they hear God or what he sounds like. For instance, "I don't know. I try but I have a listening problem" and "I make time to listen to God, but sometimes I'm not sure if I hear him." Others indicate putting forth effort toward hearing God, but failure to do so for lack of time spent listening.

Some who did not respond with an absolute negative indicated a fluctuation in their ability to attend to God's activity in their life. For example:

"Yes and no—lately I have been hearing mostly silence, though I most regularly pray in the morning and sleep hasn't been well."

"Yes but inconsistently. I have a desire to be more attentive to his work, but I am often too busy to really listen."

Many others are putting forth effort to listen to the Holy Spirit in various ways and are attending to God's activity in their life. The following are examples of affirmative answers:

"Yes, I pray throughout the day for God's guidance and I try to follow His guidance."

"Yes, through quiet times and meaningful conversations with Godly men and women."

"Yes. I am always looking for where God is moving, what He is doing."

"Yes. I pray often in the car and before bed."

"Yes. I pray several times daily, and with a focused time at night."

“Yes. Through personal quiet times and mentorship.”

“Yes. By being convicted of my sin and taking steps to go a diff[erent] direction [according] to God’s leading.”

All of these responses indicate effort on the part of the believer to hear God and, in some cases, effort put into obeying what they hear from God.

Essay Question 7.2: Where am I longing to connect more deeply with God? What do I want this to look like?

The following three categories serve to organize the thirty-three responses to this question into three primary areas. The first area consists of descriptions of the responders’ relationship with God as they connect deeply with him. Representative responses include:

“I feel his love for me...”

“I want connection with God to be refreshingly joyful, more passionate, more all-encompassing.”

“In my quiet times. I want it to look like an unrestricted conversation with my best friend.”

“Right now my inability to trust Him at times makes it difficult to connect in prayer. I would like this to change.”

The second area involves descriptions of the person’s inner nature resulting from deeply connecting with God. Representative responses include:

“I want to, in every situation, be so connected [with] the Lord [that] in a seconds time the Holy Spirit has guided me.”

"I don't know what to call it but it looks like someone more in touch [with] His Spirit's leading during all times of life [and] work. Especially when things are really busy or less than ideal."

"Doing everything for Him purposefully. Loving more [and] being less frustrated/angry with life."

"I want to be more perceptive to the Holy Spirit."

"I would truly love to see people the way God sees them. I want the vision of Christ."

"I want to embrace the basics of the gospel and find peace with God."

"...have a greater sense of trust, better confidence in myself as a child of God."

"To gain peace both in the sorrows of the past and worries of the future."

"I want my day to day to be prayer to God—from the mundane of feeding my child to the 'lofty' of praying with a colleague or student..."

The third area includes descriptions of the responders' behavioral manifestations resulting from deeply connecting with God. Representative responses include:

"Help with temptation. I want to be able to say no with a more easy mind."

"I want my prayers to be more balanced—less about me, more about praising and listening to God."

"In my time [with] children, [I] want to be present more. I want to be more disciplined about time [with] God."

"Prayer throughout my work day."

"Read [S]cripture together as a family, practice [S]abbath weekly, pray out loud more."

"With the leading of a spiritual mentor through discipleship interaction weekly."

"I want my quiet times to be more focused and internally quiet. I want to be able to discern the leading of the [H]oly [S]pirit in my life more easily and respond more immediately. I also want to be more active in my faith."

One individual responded in a way that reflects the goal of spiritual formation as presented in Chapters 2 and 3: “I want to be more aware of His desires for my family per hour, not just day, week, year. *I want my family to see Jesus when they see me/my actions/hear my words*” (emphasis added). This individual expresses their desire to be formed in the image of Christ in a way demonstrable to others.

Spiritual Growth Results

Table 4.13. Pray My Life spiritual growth results

	Not True		Needs Improvement		Most of the Time		Consistently True		Total
	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	#
It's easy for me to get around to prayer.	2.9%	1	32.4%	11	58.8%	20	5.9%	2	34
My prayer life is not mostly about myself and my needs.	8.6%	3	31.4%	11	54.3%	19	5.7%	2	35
I am able to authentically pray my emotions, losses, anger, doubts and desires. I feel comfortable telling God all the "good, bad and ugly" in me.	0.0%	0	22.9%	8	31.4%	11	45.7%	16	35
I am comfortable praying out loud with others.	2.9%	1	28.6%	10	40.0%	14	28.6%	10	35
I am aware of how God speaks to me, and I know how to listen to God and recognize his voice.	2.9%	1	38.2%	13	50.0%	17	8.8%	3	34

Category three, involving authentically praying to God (77.1%), stands out as a strength. The remaining categories each had at least one-third of the responses in columns of weakness. The greatest weakness of these four categories is the fifth, being aware of

how God speaks (41.1%). This category demonstrated only a slight leaning toward strength with the majority of strength column markings as “Most of the Time” (50%).

Identifying Longings

Thirty persons responded to the indicating longings question for this section.

Table 4.14. Pray My Life identifying longings results

Area of Longing	Count	Percent %
It's easy for me to get around to prayer.	12	40.0%
My prayer life is not mostly about myself and my needs.	4	13.3%
I am able to authentically pray my emotions, losses, anger, doubts and desires. I feel comfortable telling God all the "good, bad and ugly" in me.	10	33.3%
I am comfortable praying out loud with others.	2	6.7%
I am aware of how God speaks to me, and I know how to listen to God and recognize his voice.	16	53.3%

Not surprisingly, the category of greatest longing is also the category of greatest weakness: awareness of how God speaks (53.3%). Ten of the sixteen responses for this longing were from females (62.5%). Females also had the majority of responses for the second greatest longing—the first category about getting around to prayer—and the third greatest longing—the third category regarding praying authentically. Eight of the twelve responses for the first category were by females (66.7%) and six of ten in the third category (60%). Lastly, it is interesting to note that the two responses for longing to be comfortable praying out loud with others were both from males.

Gathering data: Focus Group Interviews

The following data is an amalgamation of both FGs organized by question. Data from both FGs is in each section below and, when necessary, indicated as FG1 or FG2 for the respective FGs. Persons are identified by pseudonym to protect confidentiality.

Question 1: Please briefly describe what you are currently doing to grow as a Christian.

For the majority of those who responded to this question—four males and three females—spiritual disciplines involving Scripture is their predominant means of growing as a Christian. Practices include reading the Bible on the train into work, identifying a topic and searching for Scriptures that deal with that topic and reading the Bible through from cover-to-cover. Engaging Scripture was mentioned in both FGs throughout the additional questions.

Relationships are also a source of growth. Four persons mentioned that their CG is a source of their growth—especially through discussing the sermon and Scripture application together. Another person mentioned that he attends a different church's Saturday morning men's prayer meeting with another Metanoia Partner. One male and one female in FG1 specifically mentioned acts of evangelism and service as ways they grow through relationships. Bess said that it is at times scary to proclaim her faith, "but if someone hadn't done that for me, I know I wouldn't be here now."

Only three persons—two males, one female—mentioned prayer as a means by which they are currently growing. Sydney said that because of his busy schedule, he is

neither praying nor reading Scripture as much as he had in the past. Bess mentioned that she is regularly challenged by the Biblical exhortation to pray continuously.

Question 2: What one or two things have been beneficial to your growth as a Christian in the past? How were they of benefit?

LTGs were mentioned by four persons. Bess said:

I felt that I got to have really good conversations [in LTG], and felt like I got to find out some answers to some questions in a non-threatening way. With CG now... I like how we have an agenda and Scripture. Like, I remember how last week's was talking about praying. I appreciate those, I think it helps me a lot. I rely on people who are more familiar to help guide me. Sometimes I think people forget that this is new [to me as a new believer].

As seen in her comments, this person misses what she had in her LTG and is finding something different but helpful in her CG.

Barrett also compared CGs to LTGs. He appreciates the CG discussions about Scripture and how "we're doing in our walks" right now, but he misses the "heavy duty accountability" of the LTG. A female who connected with Metanoia after the LTG program was removed asked Barrett to clarify what he meant by "heavy duty accountability." He responded, "[Heavy duty accountability is] like: 'How did you sin this week?' 'What did you do that did not honor God this week?' And, while you can ask yourself those questions you're not going to be as honest as if you have two brothers that are not staring you down but are walking with you." Barrett further clarified what he meant saying that it is "one thing" to read the Word and apply it yourself, but it is "another" thing to have people do it with you.

Along those lines, two persons mentioned other forms of past relationships that helped them grow as Christians. Sydney met with a spiritual director for over half-a-year before moving away from his city. This spiritual director helped Sydney open his eyes to see how God is working throughout his day. Christine said that having another female speak into her life as a young believer was beneficial, but she acknowledges a void of such relationships right now.

Family also played an important part in spiritual growth as a Christian. Joshua explained how being raised Catholic help lay a foundation for a personal faith in Christ that he discovered only recently. Levi explained that his wife challenges his faith and his perspective on spiritual matters. Bess said that recently her young daughter started asking spiritual questions that have challenged her to think more deeply about her faith.

Three classic spiritual disciplines were also mentioned: solitude, silence and intercessory prayer. Persons who mentioned these acknowledge that they do not engage in them currently, but see the benefit of them.

Question 3: In your own words, what is the goal of the Christian spiritual journey?

Four categories of responses were given for this question. The first category is responses relating to being formed in the image of Christ. Joshua said, “I guess the goal is to be like Christ, but I mean, none of us are ever going to be like Christ.” Levi entered into a dialogue with him.

Levi: “That’s the end goal.”

Joshua: "I guess the goal... is to follow, to become like Christ, but I don't think there's a final goal like 'I'm here. I've done it.'"

Levi: "That's the goal, whether or not you'll achieve it in this time. That's the end goal."

The second category of responses involved knowing and doing God's will. Marsha said the goal is "Aligning my will to his will." Ben said the goal is "life abundance," which he clarified as operating and living the will of God. He said, "we may not be happy, but we will be fulfilled because we will be blessed [by living according to God's will]."

The third category of responses consisted of relationship with Christ and deepening love in that relationship. Sydney said the goal is to:

Seek to know God, his Person, his love, all the characteristics of him more and more. Thinking about Him and studying about him and praying to him that I would become more like him. And, if that's the case, I think that would glorify him, I think that would prepare me for spending eternity with him, and would also be what my soul was created for, so I would be happiest in that.

Christine said that the goal is to "continue to grow in a more intimate relationship with God." Lena said the goal is to "Have every day of my life consumed by just loving God and just having that become bigger, having that become more and more of my life. And for other things to become less important." Leigh simply said, "Love."

Evangelism is the fourth category of responses describing the goal of the Christian spiritual journey. Leigh followed up her statement of "love" as the goal of the Christian journey by saying that this love spills out into a desire to share Jesus with others. Bess said:

If I had to put it into one thing, I guess [the goal is] to spread the good news... the good news of Jesus. And, if that's what you're doing, then that sort of reflects like how you're living, how you're praying, how you're working... because its good news!

In both of these responses, evangelism is the natural outflow of living a transformed life.

Barrett melded all four categories together when he said the goal of the Christian spiritual journey is "Looking more and more like the Person of Christ [category 1: image of Christ]. And, make that relationship [category 3: love relationship] known to those around you [category 4: evangelism]... All that wrapped up to the glory of God [category 2: God's will]."

Question 4: In your experience with Metanoia's ministry, what has been most beneficial to your growth as a Christian and why?

The character of Metanoia's community is viewed as something very spiritually formative by those interviewed. A word used in both FGs to describe the character of the community is "authentic." Christine said you cannot hide in Metanoia because of the intimacy in the church. Joshua said something similar in that Metanoia is not a community where someone shows up to "put in their time." Bess said this is both beneficial and challenging for her because she is introverted, but she loves her genuine friendships in the church. Ben said the "authenticity" he experienced is what convinced him to become a Partner.

LTGs were also mentioned as an aspect of Metanoia's ministry beneficial to spiritual growth. Abigail appreciated the weekly accountability questions. Bess said that the accountability to read Scripture in LTG helped her regularly read the Bible, because

now she is so busy and reading Scripture tends to be put “at the end of a very long to do list” at the end of a “very long and busy day.” Barrett said that while his LTG helped him grow personally, his CG helped him grow in his understanding of community.

Other aspects of Metanoia’s ministry that benefited the spiritual growth of those interviewed included sermons, the annual Partnership Retreat and service. Christine said she is challenged by the sermon “time and time again” intellectually and spiritually. Joshua and Bess said they both are positively moved emotionally by the sermons—sometimes to tears. The annual Partnership Retreat is remembered by Abigail and Bess as a place to connect with other Partners they usually do not interact with and to have deep conversations about spiritual things. Lena, Christine and Marsha all commented on how they were invited to serve on ministry teams shortly after they connected with Metanoia. Marsha, commenting on this aspect of service, said: “Like, we’re sitting here in this room and a lot of us helped paint this room. Its like, what other church can you say that about?”

Question 5: In your experience with Metanoia’s ministry, what has been least beneficial to your growth as a Christian and why?

In regards to Metanoia’s ministry, CGs were mentioned by most people as the least beneficial for their growth as a Christian. Abigail said that CGs had been “least helpful” until recently when her CG finally decided on an outward, missional focus to reach their communities. This has given her CG more purposeful meeting times. Bess said her CG is small and has not grown since it began over a year ago and that, as a

result, a familiarity between those within the CG has hindered outreach and stymied the Bible study conversations due to discussing family and work circumstances.

Christine said that CGs have been very important for “relationships, friendships and serving one another,” but not so much in regards to accountability. She notes that it is impossible to be completely vulnerable in front of twelve men and women. Commenting on the lack of accountability in CG mentioned by Christine, Marsha said that since LTGs have been removed, she has almost completely stopped reading her Bible. She later adds, “I can’t blame the church for this. I have a Bible and I have the time. I just need to do it.”

The demands of service and ministry were also mentioned as being least beneficial to one’s growth. Levi said his ministry with the church is both beneficial and a hindrance. This is because while he loves to use his gifts to serve others, sometimes it feels like a chore or a “stressor.” Levi admits that he allows it to become that way, not because the ministry is inherently stressful. Ben said that his particular ministry during WGs sometimes distracts him from the music or the sermon, with the result that he gets irritated at people.

Question 6: What spiritual longings or desires do you currently have?

Several of those interviewed mentioned a desire to see loved ones come to know Jesus as their savior. Bess longs for her father and other family members to “find Jesus.” Marsha desires the men at the homeless shelter where her CG serves to “come to know God” and “to become integrated into our community.” Leigh said that a friend who is a

Buddhist does not understand why she believes in Jesus, and she tries to find ways to share Christ with her.

Other longings were mentioned as well. Three people mentioned a desire to see God moving in their workplace—specifically in difficult situations, in the salvation of co-workers and in the provision of a new job. Ben said he longs to be married, but corrected himself by saying this is not a “spiritual” longing. Unanimously, the others in the group corrected him and said it is indeed a spiritual longing. Levi desires to see more charismatic expressions of the Holy Spirit—specifically “miracles” and “healing.” Sydney said he desires that he and his family find meaningful ways to impact the Baltimore and Ellicott City areas.

Question 7: In what way or ways do you currently feel stuck in your spiritual journey?

Lack of contentment in current circumstances is one way people feel stuck in their spiritual journey. Marsha desires to be married, Abigail struggles with feeling validated as a stay-at-home mother and Leigh struggles to believe God since he has not answered her prayers either to conceive a child without miscarrying or to make her job situation better. Joshua said that he feels like he is “spinning” and not moving forward in his faith because his life has been relatively “routine” for the past 2-3 years. While he does not believe he is “going backward,” Joshua is “waiting for something” from God, but is unsure what that may be.

Fear is another aspect of feeling stuck. Leigh is afraid to let God lead her because she is afraid it will be unpleasant. She wonders if she is leading herself. Marsha said she

understands Leigh's fear and "constantly wonders 'what if...'" God will call her to an unpleasant task.

Others mentioned a general feeling of dissatisfaction in Scripture reading. Bess desires a reading plan because she tends to read the same book in the Bible over and over again. Joshua said he used to be "moved" to read Scripture, but not so much now. Abigail misses the LTG system that provides a Scripture reading regiment.

Busy-ness and pace of life is another aspect of feeling stuck. Barrett said that he tends to be "outgoing" and loves being with people, but because he has been so busy as of late, he does not desire to be around people as much. Sydney said he agrees with Barrett and feels "too busy" for meaningful community right now.

Question 8: Has another Christian intentionally helped you grow in your faith?

If so, please describe what that looked like—consider commenting on what you did, where you met, frequency of meetings, how long the relationship lasted and how it was beneficial.

Several people mentioned Metanoia Partners who reached out to them either before they were a believer in Jesus or at a critical moment when they were beginning to ask significant spiritual questions. Bess explained how a co-worker, a Partner, boldly and unashamedly talked about her faith in the workplace. This Partner began meeting with Bess, shared the gospel with her and met with her at Starbucks several times before Bess eventually began attending Metanoia's WGs and became a believer in Jesus. Marsha had

a similar experience with a co-worker who is also a Partner. This Partner befriended her and shared her life with her after Marsha's father passed away.

Two persons mentioned Metanoia's Lead Pastor as someone who has helped them in their journey. Joshua said that after his divorce, the pastor "took me under his wing" and "kept me from going backward" through mentorship. Leigh said that the pastor and his family have been a source of guidance and inspiration to her faith. For instance, as a new believer, Leigh was moved by the way the pastor's mother befriended her and continues to care for her. Leigh is inspired by the faith of the pastor's mother and the way that she lives it.

Others mentioned people who helped them in their spiritual journey prior to connecting with Metanoia. Levi and Abigail both mentioned the same friend with whom they ran track in college. Ben mentioned a friend who shared Christ with him while they were in high school together, and who still keeps in touch with him today. Sydney described his journey with his spiritual director and Christine talked about a small group leader and her husband that she knew while in college. All of the persons who helped FG members grow were described as open and attentive to the individuals, and as coming into their life at a time when their faith was young or at a critical juncture.

Question 9: Have you ever intentionally helped another believer grow in his or her faith?

If so, please describe what that looked like—consider commenting on what you did, where you met, frequency of meetings and how long the relationship lasted.

Few people responded to this question, but those who did explained how they helped family members grow in their faith. Bess described how she loved her husband into faith in Christ by living her newfound salvation out in front of him. Bess prayed that she would live her faith in such a way that her husband would have no doubt that Jesus is real. Joshua helped his brother who was addicted to heroine. Through prayer and dialogue, Joshua's brother came to faith in Christ and "has been clean for three years." Abigail shared how her sister was initially antagonistic toward her new faith, but now is more open as a result of prayer. Christine also is intentionally helping her sister learn about God by giving her a Bible and talking with her about spiritual things.

This chapter explained the research methodology and project design for a spiritual formation assessment of Metanoia. The chapter also presented survey and FG data in summary form. The following chapter analyzes the data to discover current spiritual formation realities and interprets it to determine future opportunities. Lastly, a formative curriculum is designed and the value of assessing spiritual formation in new churches is discussed.

CHAPTER 5

OUTCOMES: DISCOVERING CURRENT REALITIES, DETERMINING FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES AND DESIGNING FORMATIVE CURRICULUM

These words I speak to you are not incidental additions to your life, homeowner improvements to your standard of living. They are foundational words, words to build a life on. If you work these words into your life, you are like a smart carpenter who built his house on solid rock. Rain poured down, the river flooded, a tornado hit—but nothing moved that house. It was fixed to the rock.

But if you just use my words in Bible studies and don't work them into your life, you are like a stupid carpenter who built his house on the sandy beach. When a storm rolled in and the waves came up, it collapsed like a house of cards.

— Jesus Christ, Matthew 7:24-27 (The Message)

[The] Lord waits for us daily to translate into action, as we should, his holy teachings... We must, then, prepare our hearts and bodies for the battle of holy obedience to his instructions. What is not possible to us by nature, let us ask the Lord to supply by the help of his grace.

— St. Benedict of Nursia, *The Rule of St. Benedict*

Discovering Current Realities: Analyzing Data

Chapter 4 detailed the research methodology and project design for conducting a spiritual formation assessment of Metanoia Church. The data collected from the spiritual formation questionnaire and two focus group interviews was presented in summary form with limited observations. This chapter analyzes and interprets the data in order to

understand the current spiritual formation realities. Future opportunities are then identified and a formative curriculum is developed. Prior to this, the project execution is briefly evaluated.

As indicated in Chapter 4, roughly two-thirds of Metanoia Partners and participants submitted surveys and were involved in FGs. Since Metanoia is a relatively small church, one-third of the population is a correspondingly relatively sizable portion of persons whose spiritual journeys were not assessed. Thus, the data collected is representative of the majority of persons connected in the Metanoia community, but not completely comprehensive.

For this reason, only macro and recurring themes are explored. Conducting another spiritual formation assessment utilizing the same questionnaire again in the future—perhaps six-to-nine months after the initial thesis-project survey—would serve to reinforce macro themes while also indicating which of the more nuanced results are significant spiritual formation themes of smaller segments of persons within Metanoia.

In light of this, the six research questions (RQs) from Chapter 1 are explored below. Current realities are discovered through answering the first three RQs.

Current Spiritual Formation Needs

Current spiritual formation needs are discovered through answering RQ 1: “What are the current spiritual formation needs at Metanoia Church?” Four needs are identified in the assessment data collected: deepening understanding and experience in prayer,

deepening understanding and experience in engaging the Word, intentionally formative relationships and engaging contemplative disciplines.

The first need identified through analyzing the data is that of deepening understanding and experience in prayer. This need is evident in the way 35.3% of survey responders indicated that “It’s easy for me to get around to prayer” is either “Not True” or “Needs Improvement” (c.f. Table 4.13). That same category is also the second greatest spiritual longing in the Pray My Life section (c.f. Table 4.14).

Survey responders also indicated difficulty in both hearing and identifying God’s voice. Some of the greatest longings indicated on the survey were “I regularly and intentionally make space in my life for prayerfully listening to God at home, at work and with others” (45.2%), “I recognize the voice and activity of the Holy Spirit in my life” (43.8%) and “I am aware of how God speaks to me, and I know how to listen to God and recognize his voice” (53.3%) (c.f. Tables 4.4, 4.6 and 4.14). The latter longing received 41.2% of the markings in the weakest columns of Table 4.13. Additionally, as seen in the responses to Essay Question 7.1, “Am I attending to God’s activity in my life and listening to him on a regular basis? Explain.,” a sizable percentage of those responding indicated struggle in this area.

The second need is deepening understanding and experience in engaging the Word. The responses to Essay Question 5.1, “Do I want to connect more deeply with God and his Word? If so, how?,” indicate that several people are both doing well in this category and desiring to see growth. Nevertheless, there are several indications that this is a spiritual formation need for the church.

As with prayer, it appears that responders do not believe they are adequately reading Scripture. Table 4.9 indicates that this is a weakness for 57.6% of responders to the category, “I have a plan for reading Scripture.” Additionally, Marsha mentioned in the FG interview that she has almost completely stopped reading her Bible since the LTG program was terminated.

Related to the spiritual need to engage the Word is the fact that 31.4% of those responding to the category “I am growing in Biblical literacy and how scriptural truth intersects my life” (c.f. Table 4.9) did so with a “Needs Improvement” mark. In the corresponding longings table (4.10), this was indicated as the second greatest longing (38.7%). This suggests that a sizable portion of the Metanoia community does not possess adequate Bible study habits.

Of great pastoral concern to the author is that while the Bible is viewed to be “alive and interesting” to 82.9% of those who responded to Table 4.9, 41.1% are not “nourished by spending time with God and his Word” on a “regular basis.” Indeed, the corresponding longing to the latter category received the greatest number of responses at 48.4% (c.f. Table 4.10). As seen in Essay Question 5.2, some of the aforementioned struggles in engaging the Word are due to busy schedules and current life circumstances.

The third area of spiritual formation need is intentionally formative relationships. As seen below, formative community in general is a strength. The distinction between formative community and intentionally formative relationships lies in the word “intentionally.” Such relationships involve concerted effort, time and relational investment. Such relationships are also referred to as “spiritual friendships” below. This need is evident in two ways.

First, the FGs revealed that intentional mentorship and discipleship—both given and received—is a weakness among those interviewed. For instance, many of those interviewed could point to relationships with persons who have helped them grow in their Christian faith in the past. However, only four persons indicated that they have intentionally helped another believer grow in their faith. Three of those four persons indicated that the only person they have helped grow in their faith was a family member or close relative. Additionally, both Bess and Abigail lamented the lack of “gray hair”—defined in their comments as empty nesters—within the church who can mentor and disciple others. If those interviewed truly are representative of the Partnership, then it is assumed that few in the church community are actively and intentionally helping young believers grow in their Christian faith.

The use of the word accountability among those surveyed and interviewed is the second way the need for intentionally formative relationships is identified. Accountability is not used in Calhoun’s Planner nor in the FG questions, but is a word brought into the data via the qualitative essay questions and FGs. For instance, accountability is mentioned by responders in Essay Question 4.2, “How am I longing to be with others in spiritual community?” One person responding to this question indicated that accountability is a mark of “high-impact spiritual community.” Another person wrote, “I desire to have greater accountability.” In response to Essay Question 5.2, “Do I want to connect more deeply with God and his Word? If so, how?,” one person wrote: “Sure—LTG format. Strong accountability in small groups.” What is not clear in these responses is how accountability is defined, but such a definition is clear in the FGs.

Generally speaking, discussion of accountability in the FGs was limited to managing sin and assuring that a believer keeps up with a spiritual discipline regimen—specifically, reading Scripture. Those who remember such accountability in LTGs give such a definition of “accountability” in response to Question 4, “In your experience with Metanoia’s ministry, what has been most beneficial to your growth as a Christian and why?” Barrett also defined “heavy duty accountability” in terms of sin management and Scripture reading in response to Question 2. Thus, it is concluded that “accountability” as used in both survey and FG responses most likely refers to a similar definition.

The fourth area of spiritual need involves contemplative disciplines. In the Worship the Trinity section of the survey, one category of assessment is “I take time to celebrate God and acknowledge my limits by deeply entering into a weekly Sabbath day that is different from every other day.” This category received 69.7% votes in the weakness columns in the Spiritual Growth table (c.f. Table 4.1) and was also the greatest spiritual longing with 51.7% (c.f. Table 4.2). Thus, responders desire Sabbath, but are not making time or space for it in their week.

Disciplines of reflection—such as listening, silence and solitude—were also indicated as weaknesses and longings. Tables 4.3 and 4.4 indicate that “I enjoy time spent alone with God in quiet reflection” is both a strength (73.7%) and a spiritual longing (35.5%). Tables 4.5 and 4.6 reveal that “I am able to leave the crowded, noisy world of acclaim and doing behind, retreating into silence and solitude with God and letting him restore me” is a weakness (72.8%) and a significant longing (46.9%).

Qualitative data also indicates that contemplative disciplines are desired, but are not pursued at the expense of schedules or pace of living. For instance, in the FGs,

Abigail explained how silence and solitude truly benefit her formatively, but she is unable to engage in those disciplines due to life commitments. As seen in the data recorded for Essay Question 5.2, there is a strong desire to have time to practice contemplative disciplines. Thus, it is concluded that disciplines of reflection are generally desired, but not regularly practiced.

Current Spiritual Formation Strengths

Answering RQ 2 reveals current spiritual formation strengths: “What are the current spiritual formation strengths at Metanoia?” There are four spiritual formation strengths found in analyzing the survey and FG data: formational community, service and incarnational living, longing for deepening relationship with the Lord and an articulated understanding of the goal of the Christian spiritual journey consistent with the witness of Scripture.

The first strength, formational community, is perhaps Metanoia’s greatest spiritual formation asset. As noted above, formational community is distinguished from intentionally formational relationships. While this distinction between the two may appear pedantic, for the purposes of this thesis-project the former is considered a corporate virtue or characteristic while the latter is considered a spiritual discipline.

Data from the fourth section of Calhoun’s Planner, Share My Life, convincingly indicates that the majority of those surveyed find formational community in Metanoia. The character of Metanoia’s community is described as “authentic” in the FGs. Those responding to Essay Question 4.1, “Am I connecting with God and others in caring

community? Explain.,” also describe the community as “really open and intimate,” “[a] wonderful example of caring community” and “available.” Responses to this question further indicate that the primary avenue for formational community for Metanoia is CG.

There is room to grow in nurturing the character of formational community. For instance, as noted in Chapter 4, many persons responded to Essay Question 4.2, “How am I longing to be with others in spiritual community?,” with a desire for deepening fellowship within the church. Two persons responded to Essay Question 4.1 stating that they sought prayer and fellowship groups outside of Metanoia to meet their needs. In the FGs, Sydney said that he connected with a Saturday morning men’s prayer group that is not associated with Metanoia per another Partner’s invitation.

The second spiritual formation strength is service and incarnational living. Data for Table 4.11 convincingly indicates that the Incarnate Christ’s Love is the strongest section assessed in Calhoun’s Planner. All six of the categories assessed had a minimum of 50% responses in the strength columns. Category two, “I am just and fair in dealing with others. I honor my contracts and commitments, even if they inconvenience me,” revealed a 91.4% rating in the strength columns. Several persons responded to the two Essay Questions for this section stating that they serve both inside and outside the church body (c.f. Essay Questions 6.1 and 6.2). Additionally, many persons in the FG explained how serving with the church is significant for them.

As with formational community, there is room to grow in this area of strength. For instance, Table 4.12 shows that 46.9% of those indicating their spiritual longings in the Incarnate Christ’s Love section desire “people with problems, needs, sorrows and losses [to] seek [them] out.” Additionally, the same Table indicates that 34.4% of

responders are unsure of what their gifts are and how to contribute them to the Kingdom of God. Additionally, as Ben and Levi indicated in the FGs, sometimes their service and ministry becomes a stressor.

Longing for a deepening relationship with the Lord is the third strength. Essay Question 7.2, “Where am I longing to connect more deeply with God? What do I want this to look like?,” revealed three general categories of responses in Chapter 4: deepening relationship with the Lord, inner life transformation and behavioral change. While such longings indicate a reality that is not currently being realized, the fact that there is such a longing is an indication of spiritual formation. As Jesus said, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied” (Matt 5:6).

Two observations are important to note about this strength. First, this strength is most evident in the responses to the first category of Table 4.1, “I am aware of God’s presence in my life, confident of his love for me and intentionally celebrate our connection,” where almost 83% of responses are in strength columns. This indicates that the majority of persons connected with Metanoia have an awareness of the reality of their relationship with the Lord and his love for them.

Second, as the table below indicates, when data is analyzed along gender lines, females indicated a majority of longings in categories reflecting deepening relationship with the Lord:

Table 5.1. Gender breakdown of selected spiritual longings for females

Table	Spiritual Longing	# Responses	# Female Responses	% Female Responses
4.2	I am aware of God's presence in my life, confident of his love for me and intentionally celebrate our connection.	9	7	77.8%
4.2	I am a joyful, thankful person who expresses gratitude to God and others easily and often.	12	9	75.0%
4.4	I regularly and intentionally make space in my life for prayerfully listening to God at home, at work and with others.	14	10	71.4%
4.6	I recognize the voice and activity of the Holy Spirit in my life.	14	9	64.3%
4.10	On a regular basis I am nourished by spending time with God and his Word.	15	10	66.7%
4.14	It's easy for me to get around to prayer.	12	8	66.7%
4.14	My prayer life is not mostly about myself and my needs.	4	3	75%
4.14	I am aware of how God speaks to me, and I know how to listen to God and recognize his voice.	16	10	62.5%

It is interesting to further note that longings dominated by male responses were for the most part task or skill oriented, as Table 5.2 indicates below:

Table 5.2. Gender breakdown of selected spiritual longings for males

Table	Spiritual Longing	# Responses	# Male Responses	% Male Responses
4.4	I recognize and live freely within my limits. I pay attention to my feelings, my body, my losses and my needs.	8	5	62.5%
4.12	I work for justice and have a heart for the dispossessed and needy that is visible to others	8	6	75.0%
4.14	I am comfortable praying out loud with others.	2	2	100%

The data above demonstrates that in general, the current spiritual formation reality for Metanoia is that females tend to desire relationship with the Lord more than males while males tend to desire the work of the Lord more than females. The data does not support a reductionist theory that Metanoia's females exclusively desire relationship with the Lord while the males desire the work of the Lord since there are responses in each area by both genders. The data does indicate that both males and females would benefit from curriculum that emphasizes praxis.

The final area of strength is an articulated understanding of the goal of the Christian spiritual journey consistent with the Scriptural witness. This is most evident in the responses given to the third FG question: “In your own words, what is the goal of the Christian spiritual journey?” As seen in the data for this question, the four categories of responses are consistent with the three-fold goal of spiritual formation in the theological framework in Chapters 2 and 3.

The first category, being formed in the image of Christ, is consistent with the inner transformation in Chapter 2 and the cultivation of the true self in Chapter 3. The second category, knowing and doing the will of God, is consistent with an aspect of sanctification in Chapter 3 and corresponds with outer transformation in Chapter 2. Likewise, the fourth category, evangelism also corresponds to the second goal of spiritual formation in the images of salt and light of Chapter 2 and evangelism in Chapter 3. The third category, relationship with God is synonymous with relational transformation in Chapter 2 and deepening love of God in Chapter 3. Thus, those Partners interviewed possess a collective understanding of the goal of spiritual formation that is Biblical. If the FGs are indeed representative of the total Partnership, it is assumed that the majority of Partners possess a similar understanding corporately.

Evaluating Current Spiritual Formation Practice

Current spiritual formation practice is assessed by answering RQ3: “What are Metanoia participants currently doing to grow spiritually?” This question is answered by reviewing two areas of spiritual discipline activity in the data: individual and corporate.

The first area of spiritual discipline is that of individual activity. As seen in the data of Tables 4.9 and 4.13, the majority of persons submitting surveys are generally connecting with God through disciplines of the Word and prayer. Additionally, as noted under current needs above (c.f. RQ 1), these two areas of spiritual discipline are in need of attention as they indicate spiritual formation needs.

One spiritual discipline frequently mentioned throughout the survey, and in particular in the Incarnate Christ's Love section, is that of serving others. There is a clear desire to serve other people within and without the Metanoia community, and there is evidence of formation occurring through such activity. This is seen in the data recorded for Essay Questions 6.1 and 6.2 in Chapter 4.

Classic spiritual disciplines other than disciplines of the Word, prayer and service are mentioned primarily in Essay Question 2.2 and elsewhere in the survey: silence, solitude, meditation, journaling, confession, worship, spiritual direction/mentoring, hospitality, evangelism and reading spiritual classics. Tithing and giving finances away to those in need are mentioned in Essay Questions 6.1 and 6.2. As noted under current needs above, busy-ness and over-commitment preclude many persons from engaging in the more contemplative disciplines.

It is important to note what classic spiritual disciplines are not mentioned in either the survey or FG data. For instance, two of the three disciplines Jesus discusses in the Sermon are mentioned—prayer and acts of charity—but one is missing: fasting. This could mean that responders are not fasting regularly enough to consider it part of their spiritual discipline regimen, or it could mean that they are not fasting at all.

Other classic disciplines discussed in *Celebration of Discipline* that are not mentioned include: simplicity, submission and confession.¹ Classic disciplines mentioned in Calhoun's *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook* that are not mentioned are: examen, mentoring others, Scripture memorization, breath and centering prayer and accountability.² Interestingly, accountability is desired by both survey responders and FG participants, but there is no indication that it is regularly practiced by anyone surveyed or interviewed.

The second area of spiritual discipline is corporate activities. For the sake of simplicity, these disciplines are assessed in terms of worship through WG, missional activity through CG and fellowship through Partnership Retreat. The following is not so much an evaluation of Metanoia's ministry structure as it is an assessment of how that structure is spiritually impacting those surveyed and interviewed.

The WG is considered a spiritually formative environment. For instance, FG participants spoke at length about how the sermons and music encourage their faith and challenge them. The WG was also mentioned in answer to Essay Question 1.1, "Am I celebrating the love and glory of God with reverence and joy (Psalm 95:1-7)? Explain." One person wrote, "this is especially true during the singing portion of the worship service." Additionally, Table 4.1 indicates "Worshipping with fellow believers gives me a deep sense of joy and God's presence" is a strength with 91.4% in strength columns.

As previously noted, a strength for Metanoia is formative community. This is primarily experienced in the CG environment. Formative activities associated with CGs

¹ Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* (New York: HarperCollins, 1998), contents.

² Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices That Transform Us* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), contents.

in the responses to survey essay questions—especially in Essay Questions 4.1 and 4.2—include service, Bible study, sermon application and caring for one another. As noted below under “Challenges for Effective Spiritual Formation,” there are a few persons who desire Metanoia to provide a corporate level outlet for the discipline of accountability through an environment like LTG.

Metanoia U was not mentioned in either survey or FG responses. At the time of writing, the only Metanoia U class offered is a retreat that helps persons identify their personal calling. Only eleven of forty Partners (27.5%) have attended the retreat. Thus, at this time Metanoia U does not provide significant or memorable formative value for the Metanoia community.

One final corporate activity mentioned in the FG but not in the survey is the annual Partnership retreat. The retreat was mentioned in response to Question 4 pertaining to what has been most spiritually formative about Metanoia’s ministry. All responses about the retreat were positive and consisted of recounting fond memories of informal discussions and formal teaching experience. Though beyond the scope of the project design, the author’s preschool aged daughter still recalls the teaching, songs and activities that the children engaged in at the previous Partnership retreat over half-a-year ago at the time of writing. This suggests that perhaps the retreat is a formative environment not just for adult Partners, but for entire families.

Determining Future Opportunities: Interpreting Data

Future opportunities are determined through answering the remaining three RQs. Much of what is written below consists of summaries of the data and current realities previously addressed. The future opportunities determined in this section are bridges between current realities and designing formative curriculum.

Opportunities for Improvement

Opportunities for improvement upon Metanoia's current spiritual formation realities are determined by answering RQ 4: "What are the opportunities for improvement in spiritual formation at Metanoia?" Three opportunities for improvement are determined from the needs and strengths above: providing avenues to discover and engage in disciplines of Word and prayer, providing avenues for formative relationships and leveraging Metanoia U.

The first opportunity for improvement involves providing avenues to discover and engage in disciplines of Word and prayer. As demonstrated above, an awareness of the importance of regularly practicing such disciplines is a spiritual formation strength. The need for improvement is discernable in how many people acknowledged lack of engaging in these disciplines for various reasons. Room for improvement is also identified through how many people expressed a longing to go deeper in these disciplines. While the onus to practice these disciplines falls on the individual disciple, there remains a responsibility for the church leadership to provide corporate avenues for education and askesis.

Askesis is a term referring to the praxis of spiritual formation, and thus is distinguished from classroom forms of education. Chan explains the role of askesis in *Spiritual Theology*:

The Christian life is from beginning to end a work of divine grace. Actual progress in that life, however, comes through diligent exercise of the means of grace. Acts are utterly basic, small acts, which over time form the Christian character.... I call this approach an “asceticism of small steps,” of which the first is prayer. Prayer is the first ascetical principle because all the other spiritual exercises depend on it.

Chan later clarifies what he means by asceticism and how it relates to askesis:

The term *ascetical* needs some clarification, since it almost always has a pejorative connotation in popular usage and since it is a key concept in our study. It is derived from the Greek, *askein*, “to train,” and was originally applied to the training of athletes (*askesis*). To describe spiritual theology as ascetical implies that systematic and disciplined spiritual exercises constitute the primary means of spiritual development.³

As seen below, education and askesis—or praxis—are essential to improving upon Metanoia’s current spiritual formation activities.

The second opportunity for improvement is providing avenues for formative relationships in the two ways mentioned above: mentorship and accountability. There is a clear desire within the Metanoia community to receive peer-to-peer accountability and a discernable lack of giving and receiving the mentorship of other believers (c.f. Tables 4.7 and 4.8, Category 1). As with disciplines of Word and prayer, the responsibility for engaging in formative relationships, or spiritual friendships, falls upon the individual to initiate while the corporate body can facilitate such relationships.

The final opportunity for improvement involves leveraging Metanoia U. The previous two opportunities for improvement can be addressed in some measure through a

³ Simon Chan, *Spiritual Theology: A Systematic Study of the Christian Life* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 11, 19.

robust Metanoia U curriculum offering education and askesis for disciplines of Word, prayer and spiritual friendship. Additionally, leveraging Metanoia U can fill in educational gaps through exhortation and experience beyond the WG and annual retreat.

Challenges for Effective Spiritual Formation

Challenges for effective spiritual formation are determined by answering RQ 5: “What are the challenges for effective spiritual formation at Metanoia?” There are two primary challenges for effective spiritual formation: the pace of life lived by many with in Metanoia and the pervasive reductionist understanding of accountability.

The theme of busy-ness, overcommitted schedules and generally poor time management that results in stressful living and stunted spiritual formation is found throughout the survey. The theme was particularly developed in Essay Question 2.2 in the Open Myself to God section. Elsewhere, in the second Worship the Trinity essay question dealing with longing to grow deeper in celebration of God, one person wrote how their schedule prohibited them from going deeper in celebration of the Trinity: “I can hear him saying, ‘Take a drink of the well that doesn’t run dry’—but I’m just not in a season where I can sit down [and] do that. I’m looking to be able to refill on the run [and] enjoy that he’s running alongside me.” Responses like these indicate a sense of helplessness or inability to change the pace of life lived.

Two persons wrote how their busy schedules prevent them from growing in authenticity in relationships and in self-awareness in the first Relinquish the False Self and Idols of Your Heart essay question. One of them wrote that they are growing in this

category by “Reducing the amount of ‘things to do’ in my life and allowing time for engaging with people I don’t have strong relationships with.” In the second essay question to this category, the other person wrote of how their excessive responsibilities hinder their formation: “I feel his pull to let go of the other things—but I can’t see how my responsibilities can be changed or diminished so that I can pursue him where he’s leading.” These responses reveal a correlation between stress, busy-ness and over-commitment with shallow relationships with God and others.

The second challenge for effective spiritual formation is the reductionist understanding of accountability to sin management and monitoring spiritual discipline regimens. The desire for accountability in both Scripture reading and sin management is a laudable desire and ought to be leveraged. However, there is much more to spiritual friendship and other formative relationships than accountability in these two areas.

For instance, such relationships must explore increasing affection for God in addition to those ways believers sin against God. Another way spiritual friendship is more than accountability is through peer-to-peer spiritual direction involving evaluation and exhortation of one’s current spiritual discipline regimen. Should a vehicle for formative relationships be re-introduced in the future, the challenge is to affirm the desire for such accountability relationships while clearly articulating a broader perspective of what such formative relationships can be.

Education and Praxis Opportunities

RQ 6 addresses aspects of Christian spiritual formation that need to be taught: “What are some of the aspects of Christian spiritual formation that need to be taught in order to educate the Metanoia community in spiritual formation?” The aspects of Christian spiritual formation that need to be taught are discussed in detail above; therefore, this section serves as a summary of those aspects.

The first aspect that needs to be taught is that of disciplines related to the Word. Specific disciplines that need to be addressed include forms of Bible study and contemplative reading. Calhoun says of meditation, a form of contemplative reading, that the God-given fruit of the discipline is “developing sight for the interior things of God in the natural and external world” and “seeing beyond a first glance and first impression to the heart of God.”⁴ The discipline of Bible study will increase Biblical literacy. When balanced with contemplative reading, both disciplines provide means for experiencing God’s presence through the Word.

The second aspect, related to the first, is that of disciplines related to prayer. Such disciplines include, but are not limited to: learning to recognize God’s voice, silence, centering prayer and intercessory prayer. These disciplines will help people grow in confidence of hearing God’s voice and responding to Him. For instance, Calhoun says the God-given fruit of centering prayer is, among other things, “learning to listen to God,” “living in more awareness of your union with Christ” and “bringing stillness into the busyness of life.”⁵ Disciplines of Word and prayer can also be addressed through

⁴ Calhoun, *Handbook*, 172.

⁵ Calhoun, *Handbook*, 205.

education on how to engage in what is commonly referred to as a “quiet time” or “devotional” in Evangelical circles.

Two other aspects of spiritual formation that need to be taught in order to educate the Metanoia community include understanding the goal of spiritual formation and formative relationships. A clearly articulated and easily accessible definition of the goal of spiritual formation will serve to provide a direction and metric for growth. Understanding the goal may also broaden an understanding of formative relationships from accountability to spiritual friendship. Such a robust understanding of how formative relationships positively impact the believer’s spiritual formation may generate interest in giving and receiving mentorship.

A final aspect of spiritual formation that needs to be taught is discovering and using spiritual gifts. This area is only briefly identified in the data as a desire in Table 4.12, Category 3. Descriptions of using gifts and resources is limited primarily to missions, service, money and time in response to Essay Questions 6.1 and 6.2. Understanding one’s spiritual gifts and discovering ways to use such gifts to the benefit of the church and the world is spiritually formative for both the individual and the entire church. This, in turn, helps believers to be an *oikos* light where they live, work and play while simultaneously displaying a collective glow of transformation like a city on a hill (c.f. Matt 5:14-16).

Designing Formative Curriculum: Contextualization and Theological Application

Prior to conducting the assessment of Metanoia, the author assumed that a small group type Bible study on the Sermon would be sufficient to meet Metanoia's spiritual formation needs. However, after observing current realities and analyzing the contextual issues related to spiritual formation for Metanoia, the author realized how one-dimensional a Bible study is for tackling the myriad nuances of spiritual formation for Metanoia. What follows is the author's journey from one-dimensional thinking to a multi-faceted, total church curriculum for spiritual formation. Thus, if a Bible study on the Sermon is ever produced for Metanoia, it will only be one element of a much larger and comprehensive curriculum for spiritual formation.

Current realities paint a picture of spiritual formation strengths and needs. Future opportunities provide bridges between current realities and designing formative curriculum. The following design for formative curriculum is a melding of the data gathered in Chapter 4, the current realities and future opportunities determined above and the theological framework for spiritual formation explored in Chapters 2 and 3. The ministry and community context in Chapter 1 is also considered in designing a philosophically missional formative curriculum.

Contextualization

The context for formative curriculum is Metanoia's ministry and community structure explored in Chapter 1 and the current spiritual formation realities researched in Chapters 4 and 5. A contextualized spiritual formation curriculum must bear the

following characteristics to be formative for Metanoia: relational, missional, experiential and counter-cultural. These characteristics are briefly described below.

The spiritual formation curriculum must first be relational. As seen above, Metanoia's community is a formational strength for the church. The curriculum must leverage this strength by incorporating relationship as essential to formation education and praxis. Additionally, the ethnic diversity in the Ellicott City area consists of cultures that place high value on relational and familial stability to foster identity. A decentralized relational curriculum similar to the dyad and triad model of LTGs would pass easily between families and other cultural groups of people.

The second characteristic is missional. One of Metanoia's current formation strengths is the missional activity of gospel proclamation through both word and deed. A curriculum that highlights missional deeds into formative pathways might be attractive to new believers in the Ellicott City area because of the high value on community involvement and activism. From an evangelistic perspective, non-believers might be more open to the Person and teachings of Christ after working alongside his church in order to meet needs of the disenfranchised together.

The curriculum must also be experiential. "Experiential" includes immersive and liminal experiences like the annual Partnership retreat and CG missional activities. Experiential curriculum might be broadened to include additional retreats for contemplative disciplines. The Ellicott City area is skeptical of Evangelical faith, so an experiential curriculum creates an environment in which formation is active and visible. This is related to the fourth and final characteristic: counter-cultural.

Counter-cultural formative curriculum must address the spiritual strongholds in the Ellicott City area and in the Metanoia community. The greatest of these strongholds is variously referred to throughout this thesis-project as busy-ness, stress, anxiety and over-commitment. Spiritual disciplines requiring sacrifice—such as fasting, simplicity and stewardship—must be emphasized. Hunger and thirst for contemplative disciplines—such as silence, solitude and Sabbath—must be nurtured. The practice of sacrificial and contemplative disciplines must become the “norm” for the Metanoia community if the church is to look—and “be”—substantially different from the non-believing population in the surrounding area.

Theological Application

The theological framework for spiritual formation based upon the Sermon offers numerous implications for formative curriculum within the Metanoia context. The following is a contextualized, philosophically missional formative curriculum that utilizes the Sermon and the theological framework. Each element of the curriculum corresponds to one of the five aspects of the author’s theological framework. The bridges to formative curriculum—“future opportunities” (RQs 4-6)—and the contextual characteristics detailed above are highlighted in order to demonstrate connections to the research data.

First, the Sermon serves as a manifesto for discipleship to Jesus, which corresponds with the gospel as the locus of Christian spiritual formation. Possible applications for formative curriculum include a seeker or a new believer class that unpacks the foundational aspects of discipleship to Jesus as found in the Sermon and the

surrounding context of the kingdom of heaven in Matthew. Such classes can ensure that new Partners understand both the gospel and the nature of discipleship to Jesus as kingdom citizens. Additionally, if required for new Partners, the classes can help new believers discover and engage disciplines of Word and prayer as ways to help them grow in their new faith while at the same time exhort veteran saints to practice fundamental disciplines for spiritual formation (c.f. RQ 4 and RQ 6).

These classes are counter-cultural in that they challenge perceptions and beliefs of alternative spiritualities and world religions. Such classes also provide opportunities for Partners with spiritual gifts of teaching to utilize their gifts while helping new and young believers grow in their faith. Incorporating the classes into the Pathway to Partnership will help ensure that all incoming Partners understand the context of discipleship as the gospel of the kingdom of heaven and the importance of engaging in disciplines of the Word and prayer for spiritual formation.

Corresponding with the goal of spiritual formation, the Sermon provides an objective metric for spiritual formation via the Beatitudes, salt and light and deepening relationship with Father. A potential application is providing an avenue for spiritual friendship through methods similar to the LTG accountability questions. The questions would focus on celebrating and encouraging the spiritual fruit of inner, outer and relational transformation rather than a reductionist approach of accountability as sin management and enforcing spiritual discipline regimens (c.f. RQ 5). Formative groups emphasize the relational and experiential characteristics of a contextually formative curriculum. Thus, this is one potential means of encouraging the types of formative

relationships identified as a need above while at the same time providing a deeper understanding of the goal of Christian spiritual formation (c.f. RQ 6).

Metanoia's previous experience with LTGs proves Cole's axiom that such groups must exist organically. For this reason, these formative groups would not be official "programs" in Metanoia's ministry structure so as to avoid competing with CG and adding additional scheduling burdens. Rather they will be encouraged as optional tools for persons desiring to grow in their faith with another believer or two. A simple solution for a non-programmatic formative group is to offer an LTG type card containing revised questions (c.f. Chapter 1) and to encourage believers who are interested to seek out one or two other individuals with whom they can be in spiritual friendship.

Perhaps the continued interest in LTGs and accountability stems from the lack of such a tool for people who desire one. In the void of such a tool, former LTG participants might be expressing a spiritual need in language and terms that they are familiar with from LTGs. Thus, the introduction of such a tool might help revise the story of reductionist expectation that LTG-type groups exist only for sin management and spiritual discipline accountability.

Another way the goal of spiritual formation can be emphasized relationally is through spiritual direction—variously described above as "mentoring," "discipling" and "spiritual direction." Elders can be trained to practice the ancient art of spiritual listening to provide direction. Additionally, following the example of Titus 2:3-5, a group of women can be identified, trained and commissioned to provide direction for other women in the church. This will help answer the need identified above in which women are desiring deepening relational connection with the Lord. Both the spiritual friendship tool

described above and spiritual direction emphasis leverage the strength of formative community to address the need for mentorship (c.f. RQ 4 and RQ 6).

Third, the Sermon's teaching on Scripture, the law and obedience to the law reinforce that the authority for spiritual formation is the written Word of God. Educational classes in the form of Metanoia U lectures or small group dialogues might provide ways to increase Biblical literacy. This will help leverage Metanoia U for spiritual formation, an opportunity for improvement mentioned above (c.f. RQ 4). Experiential elements can be added as well—such as education and praxis on “how to have a ‘quiet time’” for new and young believers. The goal of such classes is Bible application—or, rather, passing on knowledge of Scripture with the intent that it be obeyed and experienced (c.f. RQ 4 and 6).

As with a new and young believer course, Biblical literacy is counter-cultural by affirming the objective authority of the Word. It is also cross-cultural in that the Word of God is authoritative for every culture—an important emphasis in such a diverse region of the nation. Some classes can be designed missionally to welcome non-believers to encounter the Word and dialogue over how it addresses cultural issues and concerns. This is an idea stemming from the way Jesus taught both his disciples and the crowd through his Sermon. Additionally, such thought-provoking classes might be well received in the highly educated Ellicott City area.

Fourth, the Sermon contains guiding principles on spiritual discipline, which corresponds with the means of spiritual formation. Periodic retreats focused on various spiritual disciplines such as prayer (c.f. Matt 6:5-15) are potential ways to apply the

Sermon in a broader formative curriculum. Such experiential opportunities can help persons engage in different disciplines of prayer (RQs 4 and 6).

Retreats can be designed to provide extended silence, solitude and Sabbath rest, thus providing a contemplative alternative to a busy life—one of the challenges to effective spiritual formation (c.f. RQ 5). Retreats could also provide experiential opportunities to engage in some of the other classical spiritual disciplines not represented in the research data. The purpose of such retreats would be education through an immersive, hands-on experience. Thus, such retreats also emphasize the experiential contextual characteristic.

The retreats might also serve a missional purpose. In *Speaking of God*, Ben Campbell Johnson explains the similarities between Christian spiritual direction and the missional activity of evangelism. He explains the way the two are connected:

If we should label personal evangelism as ‘initial spiritual direction,’ would not that connect the two? Both concern the divine-human relation: evangelism seeks to initiate it and spiritual direction to mature it. Both deal with human consciousness: evangelism seeks to create a new center in human awareness (the presence of Christ), and spiritual direction endeavors to expand that awareness. Both evangelism and spiritual direction expect a response of trust from the subject: evangelism calls for an initial response of faith in Christ as Savior and Lord, and spiritual direction a continued disposition of trust in Christ’s activity in one’s life.⁶

Direction is to the veteran saint what evangelism is to the non-believer: helping an individual identify both the work and the presence of the Spirit in his life.

In other words, both the evangelist and the spiritual director care for the soul of a non-believer or believer respectively by discerning and pointing out the Spirit’s activity and presence. Both evangelism and spiritual direction are on the same continuum of soul

⁶ Ben Campbell Johnson, *Speaking of God: Evangelism as Initial Spiritual Guidance* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991), 26.

care. Therefore, retreats that are open to both believers and non-believers might provide an additional venue for non-believers to encounter the numinous reality of the Spirit.

The other two spiritual disciplines mentioned in the Sermon—charity and fasting—ought to be emphasized in formative curriculum as well. Charity naturally lends itself to stewardship, which in turn lends itself to a broader understanding of spiritual gifting. Metanoia U courses on stewardship and spiritual gift discovery with an emphasis on application can create experiential opportunities for people to grow in their understanding of how God has designed them. As the data suggests, identifying spiritual gifts is an opportunity for education and praxis (c.f. RQ 6).

An intentional corporate emphasis on fasting might indirectly influence the way people make decisions about their lifestyle (c.f. RQ 5). Fasting is counter-cultural in that it challenges the affluence of the Ellicott City area. It is also counter-cultural to Metanoia in that it challenges the believers' agenda and lifestyle. Fasting can be emphasized during the annual Lenten season by encouraging believers to fast from forms of technology, media or social media—a form of the spiritual discipline of simplicity. Fasting can also be experientially engaged by emphasizing a corporate Sunday Sabbath on which ministry meetings and classes are discouraged.

Lastly, the Sermon emphasizes that the context of spiritual formation is Christian spiritual community. Metanoia's CGs are communal environments tasked with the missional directive of experiencing and expressing the love of Jesus Christ. Rather than reinventing the wheel, the CG program could be specifically evaluated for potential ways to facilitate a spiritually formative environment without compromising the primary missional directive of CGs. For, as demonstrated above, the missional directive of CGs

and the formative community experienced in CGs resulted in CGs viewed by many as spiritually formative.

The following table illustrates how the Sermon corresponds with the theological framework for spiritual formation. Implications for formative curriculum outlined above are included in addition to references to specific ways the curriculum addresses RQs:

Table 5.3. Applying the Sermon on the Mount and contextual data to develop spiritual formation curriculum for Metanoia Church

Aspect of Spiritual Formation	Corresponding Sermon on the Mount Texts	Bridges: Future Opportunities (RQs 4-6)	Potential Application for Metanoia Church
Locus: The Gospel	Citizenship in the Kingdom of Heaven (Matt 4:12-22; 5:1-2; 7:13-14, 21-29)	RQs 4 and 6: Disciplines of Word and prayer	Seeker, new believers and Partnership classes with focus on exploring fundamentals of discipleship to Jesus
Goal: <i>Imago Christi</i>	Evidence of Transformation (Matt 5:3-16; 6:19-34; 7:7-11)	RQs 4, 5 and 6: Formative relationships (specifically mentorship) Redefining accountability Teaching the goal of spiritual formation	Spiritual formation groups that emphasize spiritual friendship through focus on celebrating and encouraging inner, outer and relational transformation Spiritual direction—Elder and Titus 2 directional ministry
Authority: Scripture	The Law, the Prophets and the Christ (Matt 5:17-48)	RQs 4 and 6: Leverage Metanoia U Disciplines of Word	Educational classes with focus on Biblical literacy and application Topical and apologetic dialogues open to the broader public
Means: Spiritual Disciplines	Acts of Righteousness in Secret (Matt 6:1-18)	RQs 4, 5 and 6: Disciplines of prayer Challenge the pace of life lived by many Discover and use spiritual gifts	Spiritual retreats for immersive learning through experience. Some retreats designed for non-believers to participate as well Courses for discovering and using spiritual gifts Emphasis on fasting and Sabbath keeping
Context: Christian Community	Guidelines for Kingdom Community (Matt 6:14-15; 7:1-6, 12, 15-20)	RQs not applicable	Evaluating CGs with focus on facilitating spiritual formation through missional activity

The curriculum above addresses the various learning styles from classroom lecture to hands-on learning experiences. The curriculum further engages individuals, small groups of persons and the church as a whole. It also incorporates both believers and non-believers with the end goal being that Metanoia truly exists as a “spiritual community moving toward Jesus Christ.” Thus, the curriculum is a pathway for congregational spiritual formation.

Conclusion: Evaluation of Thesis-Project Outcomes and the Value of Assessing Spiritual Formation in New Churches

The thesis for this D.Min. project is, “Addressing the Spiritual Formation Needs of a New Church: Current Realities, Future Opportunities and Formative Curriculum.” As stated in Chapter 1, the primary purpose for this project is “to assess and meet the spiritual formation needs of Metanoia Church so that Partners and participants are provided with an intentional, contextual and missional curriculum to grow into the image of Christ.” The survey and FG research revealed a picture of Metanoia’s current spiritual formation realities. Through analyzing and interpreting the data, future opportunities were discovered. As demonstrated above, these future opportunities bridge the gap between current realities and a formative curriculum. Thus, it is with confidence that the author believes the formative curriculum outlined in this chapter addresses the current and contextual spiritual formation needs of Metanoia.

By God’s grace, the related goal of this thesis project, “for persons within the Metanoia community to experience Holy Spirit empowered transformation that comes in

‘putting on Christ’ (c.f. Rom 13:14)” will be accomplished as the formative curriculum is implemented. Likewise, by God’s grace, the related anticipated outcome “that Metanoia clearly expresses a deepening spiritual transformation in Christ that overflows into a visible witness to the world” will occur as individuals experience the transformation wrought by the Spirit. For these reasons, the author will work with the other Elders of Metanoia to implement the curriculum at a pace appropriate for the church.

The curriculum should be implemented over a period of time long enough to evaluate each curriculum element as they are added. An evaluation period is important for two primary reasons. First, the curriculum should be evaluated to determine if it does, in fact, meet the spiritual formation needs of Metanoia. This is important because only about two-thirds of the Metanoia community participated in survey and focus group research. Thus, the curriculum is designed to meet the needs of that population. An evaluation period will help determine if the curriculum is beneficial for the remaining population that did not participate in the study and for new persons who have connected with Metanoia since the survey was conducted. Additionally, an evaluation period takes into account that spiritual formation is a dynamic process. Those persons surveyed—and their respective spiritual formation needs—change over time.

Secondly, there must be room for failed experiments and improvement upon what appears to address spiritual needs. For instance, just because analysis of the data suggests that spiritual retreats would address certain spiritual formation needs, that does not mean they will address those needs. This could be because retreats are planned poorly, resulting in a lost opportunity to meet needs. Or, perhaps, retreats are scheduled at times or locations inconvenient to many persons, and thus have low attendance. Retreats could

simply not be a contextual means of meeting needs of the remaining one-third population that did not submit a survey or participate in a focus group. In other words, there are a whole host of reasons why different aspects of the curriculum might not meet needs, hence the need to implement the curriculum with patience and a metric for assessment.

One of the secondary purposes for this thesis-project is to “produce a substantial work of scholarship that benefits the global Christian church in understanding Christian spiritual formation within both a new church and other churches that adopt missional strategies.” Whether this thesis-project benefits the global Christian church is yet to be determined. To this end, four observations on the research and outcomes of this thesis-project are explored for the benefit of other church planters and missionally minded ministry practitioners.

First, the author’s intent was to provide research in the area of spiritual formation for new and missional churches. Through conducting his research, the author realized: there is no qualitative difference between a young church—Metanoia is in her seventh year of ministry and mission—and a more established church.⁷ Churches of any age can equally benefit from a spiritual formation assessment and a contextualized curriculum.

Often, new churches are planted as contextualized expressions of Christ’s church within a specific community. This is the same intent of missional churches, whether new or old. Thus, the author’s assumption was that a contextualized expression of Christ’s church requires a uniquely contextualized spiritual formation curriculum. However, if any church is to impact its surrounding context with the gospel, it must bear the fruit of the spiritual transformation of individuals formed *imago Christi*. Thus, the author came to

⁷ The author is indebted to his spiritual director, Dr. Randy Millwood, for challenging him to consider spiritual formation for Metanoia from a starting point of ecclesiology rather than missiology.

the conclusion that spiritual formation assessment is of equal value to churches of any age or ministry philosophy.

A second observation is related to the first observation. In the first two years of planting Metanoia, the author was extremely busy as a “generalist.” In other words, the author functionally served as an evangelist, missionary, administrator, teacher, preacher, pastor, entrepreneur CEO, fundraiser, administrative assistant, event coordinator and liaison to organizational partners among other things. There was little to no time to assess the spiritual formation realities for Metanoia during this season of ministry. In the subsequent years, Metanoia has grown and new leaders have assumed many of the duties mentioned above such that the author now has time to conduct an assessment of spiritual formation realities.

This observation leads to a conundrum of sorts. On the one hand, it is not feasible for new churches to assess spiritual formation realities because it may stretch the church planting leadership too thin. On the other hand, a new church cannot afford to not assess the spiritual formation realities because, as seen above, transformed lives are a profound witness to the validity of the gospel.

Therefore, while it may prove difficult to conduct an assessment at the level and scope of this thesis-project, a simplified assessment is of critical value for new and young churches. Having a tool and method in place for such an assessment would have benefited Metanoia’s leadership a few years ago when the LTG program was initially evaluated. Such assessments like Calhoun’s Planner can easily be distributed and reviewed in church plant core groups twice a year. Periodic assessments would not only benefit the church plant leadership by helping them understand current formative

realities, but would also benefit those persons who participate in the assessment by providing an opportunity for personal reflection and evaluation.

There is third observation about assessing spiritual formation realities in new and missional churches: ideally, a curriculum for formation should be built into the strategy for planting a new church. This curriculum can be as organic or as structured as it needs to be according to context and leadership abilities. This is the greatest strength in Cole's LTGs because the LTGs are actually a church planting strategy in and of themselves. Perhaps a practitioner reviewing this thesis-project might be inspired to experiment with Cole's LTGs or other simple formative curricula as strategies for church planting.

One final observation on the matter of church planting and spiritual formation. Often church planters are called upon to assess the relative success and viability of their new church according to quantitative data: such as number of baptisms, number of professions of faith, WG attendance, small group attendance, new contacts, monies in and monies out. Indeed, these metrics are employed to evaluate the relative "success" of more established churches as well.

The author was blessed to be financially supported by a church planting organization—the Baptist Convention of Maryland/Delaware—that required such quantitative data in addition to qualitative data such as stories of transformation and ways the financial partner(s) could pray for the church. In a society that values the bigger-is-better and productivity as measures of success, the qualitative data of spiritual formation often is obscured by the quantitative data. The author would like to see more research devoted to exploring a metric for church planting that leans heavily upon qualitative data for evidence of spiritual formation. A metric that assesses the planter's personal spiritual

formation would be even more beneficial. Tracking formation in the church plant and in the church planter's own life can indicate where and how the Spirit is at work in addition to corporate and personal areas of weakness. Qualitative assessments can also provide encouragement for the church planter that his work is making a kingdom difference.⁸

Perhaps it is for this reason that the author paused many times while combing through the survey and FG data to express prayers of gratitude to the Lord Jesus Christ for what he is doing in Metanoia. The author discovered that the data in this thesis-project not only served a kingdom-sized purpose for the future of Metanoia—and hopefully other churches—but, for the author's own soul. For, right before his eyes in numbers, words and phrases was proof that the fruit of his labor is in fact making kingdom-sized impact in the lives of the Metanoia family.

* * *

The D.Min. thesis-project was truly a revolutionizing journey at the soul level for the author-practitioner. His intellect was challenged and deepened through his reading, the residency lectures and the interactions with his cohort. The affections of his heart were stirred by the annual residency retreats. His soul was cared for by his spiritual director and the numerous new spiritual disciplines that he was introduced to and subsequently learned to practice. His strength was renewed through the observable impact the Spirit has had in the spiritual community of believers that is Metanoia Church.

⁸ Adam Feldman, "Church Planting: Before You Throw In the Towel, Read This Article," BaptistLIFE (September 2009), <http://www.baptistlifeonline.org/2009/09/church-planting-before-you-throw-in-the-towel-read-this-article/> (accessed December 6, 2011). The author explored these thoughts through personal narrative in this article.

Lastly, the author is encouraged and hopeful that implementing the formative curriculum outlined above will facilitate spiritual transformation and revival in his personal life, his family and in Metanoia so that others will benefit tremendously from this thesis-project journey.

Soli Deo gloria!

APPENDIX 1

INFORMED CONSENT AND SPIRITUAL FORMATION QUESTIONNAIRE

The following is a copy of the informed consent and spiritual formation questionnaire use to gather survey data for this thesis-project. It is reproduced with original text formatting. The consent and questionnaire were approved by the GCTS IRB.

Spiritual Formation Questionnaire

Purpose of Questionnaire and Informed Consent

This questionnaire is designed to explore the current spiritual realities—strengths, needs and challenges—of Metanoia Church. The information you provide will be helpful for developing a comprehensive spiritual formation curriculum designed specifically for Metanoia Church. This study is being conducted by Adam Feldman, Lead Pastor of Metanoia Church, Ellicott City, MD. Please be assured that all of your answers will be kept strictly confidential. The information that you provide will be presented only in summary form, in combination with the responses of other participants in this study. The answers that you give will never be linked with your name. Results will be reported in Adam Feldman's Doctor of Ministry thesis-project (Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary) and may also be shared with the leadership and Partnership of Metanoia Church. By completing this questionnaire, you have given your consent that you are a voluntary participant in this study.

Name (please print legibly): _____

Signed: _____ Date: _____

If participant is under the age of 18:

Parent/Guardian name (please print legibly): _____

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Spiritual Formation Questionnaire

I. General Information

1. What is your gender (circle one)?

Male Female

2. Are you actively involved in a Metanoia Church Community Group (circle one)?

Yes No

3. Did you participate in the Metanoia Church Life Transformation Groups (LTG) program (circle one)?

Yes No

4. How long ago did you make a decision to trust Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior for the forgiveness of your sin, for salvation and for eternal life with God (circle one)?

Never 1 year or less 2-5 years 6-10 years 11+ years

5. Are you a Metanoia Church Covenant Partner (circle one)?

Yes, I am a Partner No, I am not a Partner

6. How long have you been a Covenant Partner with Metanoia Church (circle one)?

I am not a Partner 1 year or less 2 years 3 years 4+ years

The remainder of this questionnaire is excerpted and adapted from “Appendix 1: Spiritual Growth Planner” in *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices That Transform Us* by Adele Ahlberg Calhoun (pages 256-263). The questions pertain to seven areas of Christian spirituality that Calhoun has identified.

II. Worship the Trinity

7. Am I celebrating the love and glory of God with reverence and joy (Psalm 95:1-7)? Explain.

8. Where am I longing to move into deeper celebration of God?

9. Fill out the chart below using the following guide:

1 = not true

2 = needs improvement

3 = most of the time

4 = consistently true

Then, choose one or two categories that you resonate with and that touch on a longing to go deeper with God. Put a check in the "Desire" column.

	1	2	3	4	Desire
I am aware of God's presence in my life, confident of his love for me and intentionally celebrate our					
Worshipping with fellow believers gives me a deep sense of joy and God's presence.					
I take time to celebrate God and acknowledge my limits by deeply entering into a weekly sabbath day that is different from every other day					
I am aware of where I place people, experiences and images before God.					
I am a joyful, thankful person who expresses gratitude to God and others easily and often.					

Remember to note which desire most resonates with you and touches a longing to go deeper with God in this place.

III. Open Myself To God

10. How am I opening myself to God in deeper ways?

11. Where am I longing to let go of defenses and busyness so I can become more open to God's activity in my life?

12. Fill out the chart below using the following guide:

1 = not true

2 = needs improvement

3 = most of the time

4 = consistently true

Then, choose one or two categories that you resonate with and that touch on a longing to go deeper with God. Put a check in the "Desire" column.

	1	2	3	4	Desire
I regularly and intentionally make space in my life for prayerfully listening to God at home, at work and with others.					
I can admit my mistakes, weaknesses and growing edges to God as well as others.					
I enjoy time spent alone with God in quiet reflection.					
I recognize and live freely within my limits. I pay attention to my feelings, my body, my losses and my needs.					
I don't need to be doing something for God or others in order to feel good about myself.					

Remember to note which desire most resonates with you and touches a longing to go deeper with God in this place.

IV. Relinquish the False Self and Idols of Your Heart

13. How am I growing in self-awareness and becoming more authentic in my relationships?

14. Where am I longing to let go of secondary things so I can give myself more authentically to God and others?

15. Fill out the chart below using the following guide:

1 = not true

2 = needs improvement

3 = most of the time

4 = consistently true

Then, choose one or two categories that you resonate with and that touch on a longing to go deeper with God. Put a check in the "Desire" column.

	1	2	3	4	Desire
I am aware of my sin and blind spots and how they hurt others. I easily apologize to others and seek to live out my true self in Christ.					
I am able to leave the crowded, noisy world of acclaim and doing behind, retreating into silence and solitude with God and letting him restore me.					
I recognize the voice and activity of the Holy Spirit in my life.					
I recognize my addictions and compulsions, and am committed to living free of them.					

Remember to note which desire most resonates with you and touches a longing to go deeper with God in this place.

V. Share My Life

16. Am I connecting with God and others in a caring community? Explain.

17. How am I longing to be with others in spiritual community?

18. Fill out the chart below using the following guide:

1 = not true

2 = needs improvement

3 = most of the time

4 = consistently true

Then, choose one or two categories that you resonate with and that touch on a longing to go deeper with God. Put a check in the “Desire” column.

	1	2	3	4	Desire
I have a relationship with someone who helps me grow in my spiritual walk.					
I feel comfortable opening my home, my heart, my faith and my life to people not in my family.					
I am not judgmental toward others. I know how to make peace and deal with anger in constructive ways. I am not argumentative and contentious.					
Others describe me as honest, vulnerable, open and approachable.					
I am not hypersensitive and easily offended. I give and receive love freely and easily.					

Remember to note which desire most resonates with you and touches a longing to go deeper with God in this place.

VI. Hear God's Word

19. Am I cultivating the knowledge of God, the character of Christ and the presence of the Spirit in my life (John 16:5-15)? Explain.

20. Do I want to connect more deeply with God and his Word? If so, how?

21. Fill out the chart below using the following guide:

1 = not true

2 = needs improvement

3 = most of the time

4 = consistently true

Then, choose one or two categories that you resonate with and that touch on a longing to go deeper with God. Put a check in the "Desire" column.

	1	2	3	4	Desire
I am growing in biblical literacy and how scriptural truth intersects with my life.					
On a regular basis I am nourished by spending time with God and his Word.					
The Bible is alive and interesting to me.					
I have a plan for reading Scripture.					

Remember to note which desire most resonates with you and touches a longing to go deeper with God in this place.

VII. Incarnate Christ's Love

22. Am I contributing myself and my God-given gifts for the growth of Christ's kingdom? Explain.

23. How am I giving myself and my resources away to God and others?

24. Fill out the chart below using the following guide:

1 = not true

2 = needs improvement

3 = most of the time

4 = consistently true

Then, choose one or two categories that you resonate with and that touch on a longing to go deeper with God. Put a check in the "Desire" column.

	1	2	3	4	Desire
I work for justice and have a heart for the dispossessed and needy that is visible to others.					
I am just and fair in dealing with others. I honor my contracts and commitments, even if they inconvenience me.					
I know my gifts and contribute them to the kingdom of God. I am more concerned about building God's kingdom than my own.					
I willingly set aside my agenda in order to share my possessions, skills and time with others.					
The fruit of the Spirit is more and more evident in my life.					
People with problems, needs, sorrows and losses seek me out. They know I care.					

Remember to note which desire most resonates with you and touches a longing to go deeper with God in this place.

VIII. Pray My Life

25. Am I attending to God's activity in my life and listening to him on a regular basis? Explain.

26. Where am I longing to connect more deeply with God? What do I want this to look like?

27. Fill out the chart below using the following guide:

1 = not true

2 = needs improvement

3 = most of the time

4 = consistently true

Then, choose one or two categories that you resonate with and that touch on a longing to go deeper with God. Put a check in the "Desire" column.

	1	2	3	4	Desire
It's easy for me to get around to prayer.					
My prayer life is not mostly about myself and my needs.					
I am able to authentically pray my emotions, losses, anger, doubts and desires. I feel comfortable telling God all the "good, bad and ugly" in me.					
I am comfortable praying out loud with others.					
I am aware of how God speaks to me, and I know how to listen to God and recognize his voice.					

Remember to note which desire most resonates with you and touches a longing to go deeper with God in this place.

This concludes the questionnaire.
Thank you for your participation!

APPENDIX 2

FOCUS GROUP INFORMED CONSENT

The following is a copy of the focus group informed consent distributed and signed prior to gathering interview data for this thesis-project. It is reproduced with original text formatting. The informed consent was approved by the GCTS IRB.

Focus Group Informed Consent

Project Title: Addressing the Spiritual Formation Needs of a New Church: Discovering Current Realities, Determining Future Opportunities and Designing Formative Curriculum

Principal Investigator: Adam Feldman, Lead Pastor, Metanoia Church

Focus Group Interviewer: Dr. Randy Millwood, Missionary for Missional Leadership, Baptist Convention of Maryland/Delaware

PURPOSE

This is a research study designed and conducted by Adam Feldman as part of his Doctor of Ministry (DMin) thesis-project at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary (GCTS). The purpose of this research study is to gather data for developing a comprehensive spiritual formation curriculum designed specifically for Metanoia Church.

The purpose of this consent form is to give you the information you will need to help you decide whether to be in the study or not. You may ask any questions about the research, what you will be asked to do, the possible risks and benefits, your rights as a volunteer, and anything else about the research or this form that is not clear.

The Elders of Metanoia Church invite you to participate in this research study because you are a Covenant Partner with Metanoia and are representative of the broader church Partnership.

PROCEDURES

If you agree to participate, your involvement will last for approximately one-and-a-half hours for one of two focus group interviews conducted by Dr. Randy Millwood.

RISKS

There are no foreseeable risks in participating. The information you voluntarily offer during the focus group interview will be transcribed into text format for research purposes. The information you voluntarily offer may or may not be printed in part or in whole in the final DMin thesis-project submitted to GCTS and/or in part or in whole to the Metanoia Church Elder leadership and the Metanoia Partnership body.

Please be assured that all of your answers will be kept strictly confidential. The information that you provide may be presented only in summary form or quoted word-for-word. It will be presented in combination with the responses of other participants in the focus groups and with the responses to a church-wide questionnaire. The answers that you give will never be linked with your name.

BENEFITS

The potential personal benefits that may occur as a result of your participation in this study are:

- Metanoia Church will have a unique, contextualized spiritual formation curriculum tailored to Metanoia's current needs and future opportunities.
- Metanoia Elder leadership will have a clearer understanding of the spiritual and pastoral needs within the church body.
- Other new and missional churches will have a substantial scholarly work that can serve as a guide in establishing their own spiritual formation curriculum and in addressing their congregation's spiritual formation needs.

COMPENSATION

You will not be compensated for participating in this research project.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Records of participation in this research project will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by law. Data will be recorded in audio and/or video format and stored in a locked location for the duration of the research project. Outside of Adam Feldman and a transcriber no one else will have access to the audio and video recordings. Recordings will be destroyed upon Adam Feldman's successful completion of the DMin degree at GCTS. In the event of any report or publication from this study, your identity will not be disclosed. Results will be reported in a summarized manner in such a way that you cannot be identified.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

Taking part in this research study is voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you agree to participate in this study, you may stop participating at any time. If you decide not to take part, or if you stop participating at any time, your decision will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which you may otherwise be entitled. Data collected prior to withdrawal will be included in the study results.

QUESTIONS

Questions are encouraged. If you have any questions about this research project, please contact Adam Feldman at 443-844-2580 or adam@metanoiachurch.org. If you have questions about your rights as a participant, please contact the Chair of the Institutional Review Board at GCTS at 978-646-4176.

CONSENT

Your signature indicates that this research study has been explained to you, that your questions have been answered, and that you agree to take part in this study. You will receive a copy of this form.

Participant's Name (printed):

(Signature of Participant)

(Date)

RESEARCHER STATEMENT

I have discussed the above points with the participant. It is my opinion that the participant understands the risks, benefits, and procedures involved with participation in this research study.

(Signature of Researcher)

(Date)

APPENDIX 3

FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

The following are the questions asked in both focus group interviews. The questions were approved by the GCTS IRB.

Question 1: Please briefly describe what you are currently doing to grow as a Christian.

Question 2: What one or two things have been beneficial to your growth as a Christian in the past?

- How were they of benefit?

Question 3: In your own words, what is the goal of the Christian spiritual journey?

Question 4: In your experience with Metanoia's ministry, what has been most beneficial to your growth as a Christian and why?

Question 5: In your experience with Metanoia's ministry, what has been least beneficial to your growth as a Christian and why?

Question 6: What spiritual longings or desires do you currently have?

Question 7: In what way or ways do you currently feel stuck in your spiritual journey?

Question 8: Has another Christian intentionally helped you grow in your faith?

- If so, please describe what that looked like—consider commenting on what you did, where you met, frequency of meetings, how long the relationship lasted and how it was beneficial.

Question 9: Have you ever intentionally helped another believer grow in his or her faith?

- If so, please describe what that looked like—consider commenting on what you did, where you met, frequency of meetings and how long the relationship lasted.

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VITA

Adam Lee Feldman was born June 11, 1978 in Baltimore, Maryland. Adam is married to Kimberly and they have two children, Abigail and Joshua.

Adam graduated *Magna Cum Laude* with a Bachelor of Arts double major in English (Creative Writing emphasis) and Communication Arts from Carson-Newman College (CNC), Jefferson City, Tennessee (1999). As an Honors Program student, Adam wrote, directed and produced a two-act play at CNC. He received the Master of Divinity degree from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary (2003). Adam worked on his Doctor of Ministry degree (“Spiritual Formation for Ministry Leaders” emphasis) at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary from 2009-2012. He anticipates graduating in May 2012.

At the time of writing, Adam has served in pastoral ministry for twelve years: Pastor of Student Ministries, Crosspointe Community Church, Roswell, Georgia (1999-2002); Pastor of Worship and Arts, Crosspointe (2002-2005); and Lead Church Planter and Lead Pastor, Metanoia Church, Ellicott City, Maryland (2005-present). Adam is a church planter assessor for the Baptist Convention of Maryland/Delaware (BCMD), leads Focused Living Retreats (Church Resource Ministries) for BCMD church planters and is the leader of the Mid-Maryland Baptist Association’s mission and multiplication efforts. He has published an article for the BCMD’s BaptistLIFE on church planting.

Adam is a trained professional coffee roaster with four years experience at the Bean Hollow café, Historic Ellicott City, Maryland.